MARIANO JOSE DE LARRA, COSTUMBRISTA

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INTRODUCTION.

Origen and definition of the cuadros de costumbres in Spain and their relationship to Mariano José de Larra.

A new literary genre came into being and flourished in Spain during the first half of the nineteenth century, one which took for its organ of expression the various periodicals and reviews which were springing up all over the country. This new type is the cuadro de costumbres, i.e., articles describing contemporary life and manners. The picture might be good or bad provided that it were true. The author's manner of expression might vary from the unimpassioned reproaches of Mesonero Romanos to the stinging satire of Mariano José de Larra.

It is difficult and perhaps not necessary to set a particular date for the beginning of the articles on social customs. Every age tends to express its customs and its civilization by its literature. Social customs are painted in Rinconete

y Cortadillo, in Guzmán de Alfarache, in La Vida de Don Pablo and in fact all the picaresque novels. Quevedo's Sueños might even be called cuadros de costumbres.[1]

There was in the court of the seventeenth century a costumbrista in the person of Juan de Zabaleta to whom we owe the artistic pen pictures of El día de fiesta por la mañana y por la tarde published in 1666(?)[2]. But the time was not yet ripe for the cuadro de costumbres and Zabaleta's efforts attracted little attention.

Cánovas del Castillo (1827-1897) gives the credit of precedence for the modern articles on social customs to Victor Joseph Etienne de Jouy (1764-1846), A Frenchman, who published in the Gazette de France a series of satirical sketches of Parisian life collected under the title of L'hermite de la chaussée d' Antin ou Observations sur les moeurs et les usages français au commence-

1. See Blanco García, P. Francisco: La Lit. Esp. en el siglo XIX, 2d ed., vol.1, Madrid 1899, pp. 328-329.

2. Idem, p. 329.

ment du XIX^e siècle. It was published in five volumes (1812-1814)[3]. While Jouy's articles were well received in France he really gained more recognition in Spain due to the great French influence then prevalent. So it is that any study of the modern articles on social customs must be made with due recognition of the foreign influence. Zabaleta has precedence in Spain but, since he had little or no following, credit for the rejuvenation of the cuadros de costumbres in Spain and France must go in large measure to Jouy.[4]

Contemporaneous with Jouy's articles in France are those of the Mexican social reformer and author, José Fernández de Lizardi (1774-1827) appearing in the periodical entitled El Pensador Mexicano founded by him in December 1812. This periodical was short-lived due to the rigorous censorship but even after its suppression in 1814 he continued to publish from time to time articles of a political and social nature, many of which in the wealth of detail of habits and customs foreshadow the cos-

3. See McGuire, Elizabeth: A Study of the Writings of D. Mariano José de Larra, Berkeley 1919, pp. 124-125.

4. See Salcedo Ruiz, Angel: La Literatura Española, 2d ed., vol.3, Madrid 1916, p. 482.

tumbrista movement which only a short time later was to take hold in Spain.[5]

In 1820 there appeared, suddenly, in Madrid, a satirical paper, author anonymous, entitled El Pobrecito Holgazán. The articles were in the form of letters. Don Servando Mazculla was the imaginary correspondent of El Pobrecito Holgazán. The letters deplore the sad state of affairs in Spain and characterize the government, the Inquisition and various social evils and vices. Don Sebastián Miñano (1779-1845) is the author of these letters and should be given a place among the initiators of the cuadros de costumbres in Spain.

Miñano's articles are not without humour although somewhat monotonous and dry. His ironical praise of the proceedings of the Inquisition and the hypocrisies practised by it form a picture more ridiculous than true. Nevertheless one can easily understand the powerful effect of these satires against adversaries that did not know how to combat such a

5. See Spell, J. R.: Mexican Society as seen by Fernández Lizardi in Hispania, May 1925, p. 145; also Urbina, Luis G.: Antología del Centenario, vol. 1, Mexico 1910, pp. 265-291.

daring innovator.[6]

In 1822 appeared Mis Ratos Perdidos of Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, a series of twelve sketches which show germs of the coming new genre. In the preface to these articles Mesonero states his purpose, which is, in general, to show the effect that some of Spain's customs produce on him. Until recently it was not known that Mesonero was the author of these articles and this no doubt accounts for the fact that Mesonero has been neglected among the forerunners of the new genre.[7]

The year 1828 saw but the beginnings of the new literary genus, the costumbrista.[8] It was early in this year that Mariano José de Larra began the publication of his first periodical entitled El Duende Satírico del Día, whose motto was the following words of Boileau: Des sotises du temps je compose mon fiel.[9]

6. Miñano, Sebastián: Cartas in Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vol.62, Madrid 1870, pp. 603-638.

7. See Foulché-Delbosc, R.: Le Modèle du Panorama, Mis Ratos Perdidos in Revue Hispanique, vol.48, Paris 1920, pp. 262-306; also Mesonero Romanos, Ramón de: Memorias de un Setentón, vol. 1, Madrid 1881, pp. 269-270.

8. See Lomba, José R.: Prologue to Larra, artículos de costumbres, Clásicos Castellanos, vol.45, Madrid 1923, p. 10.

9. See Chaves, Manuel: Don Mariano José de Larra (Fígaro), Sevilla 1898, p. 24.

But the years 1828-1829 were hardly propitious ones for any sort of publication, least of all, a satirical periodical. Literature and the press were at a moment of crisis. Despotism was the rule of the land. Larra was forced to suspend his publication in August 1829. Chaves says that fourteen numbers of El Duende Satírico del Día were issued.[10] This is an error. There were in fact only five.[11] Evidently Chaves had in mind Larra's later publication, El Pobrecito Hablador.

El Duende Satírico del Día was fashioned after "The Spectator" of Addison and Steele. It was satirical and at least three of the articles dealt with social customs.[12] Discounting the first short article which is more or less introductory, the second article, El Café is the first to deal with social customs.[13] This was published in January or February 1828.[14]

Don Serafín Estébanez de Calderón (1799-1867), who wrote under the pseudonym of El Solitario, is given the priority among Spain's costumbristas by Cánovas del

10. Idem, p. 25.

11. See Nombela y Campos: Larra (Fígaro), Madrid 1906, Autores Célebres, p. 53; also Carmen de Burgos: "Fígaro," Madrid 1919, p. 95.

12. See Lomba, José: op.cit., p. 12.
13. See Carmen de Burgos: op. cit., p. 95.
14. See Lomba, José: op.cit., p. 20.

Castillo in El Solitario y su tiempo.[15] Cánovas maintains that three articles on manners by Estébanez were published before the twelfth of January 1832 on which date there appeared in the periodical, Cartas Españolas, the first article of Mesonero's Panorama Matritense,[16] entitled El Retrato. Cánovas has not taken into account the publications of Miñano, 1820, Mesonero Romanos, 1822 and Larra, 1828, and has merely established the fact that Estébanez wrote articles on manners a short time, at least, before the publication of Mesonero's El Retrato, which he evidently considers to be Mesonero's first article on social customs.

Estébanez was very interested in the study of popular customs. In July of 1831 Carnero (Director of Music and Oratory by order of Queen Cristina, July 15, 1830) founded the periodical, Cartas Españolas, and Estébanez was the literary soul of the publication. In it appeared Estébanez's Escenas Andaluzas (Estébanez was born in Málaga) from time to time during the last half of 1831.[17] These "scenes" are faithful pictures of the

15. See Cánovas del Castillo, Antonio: El Solitario y su tiempo, Madrid 1883, pp. 138-139; cited by Blanco García.
16. Ibidem; cited by Lomba.
17. See Salcedo: op. cit., p. 483.

Andalusian people and although their exaggerated and archaic language detracts from their value, yet they are to be remembered as a laudable effort in the field of articles on social customs.[18]

As previously stated,[19] El Retrato was the first of a series of articles published by Mesonero Romanos in the periodical, Cartas Españolas (in which he collaborated with Carnero from 1836-1842) under the pseudonym, El Curioso Parlante. This series was collected under the heading Escenas Matritenses and published toward the end of 1832.[20] They were later republished under the title Panorama Matritense.[21] Cejador gives Mesonero priority over others as initiator of the new genre.[22]

It is true that Mesonero is one of the initiators. We might almost say, with justice, the first, except for the Cartas of Miñano published in 1820, two

18. See Blanco García: op.cit., pp. 332-333.

19. See above, p. VII.

20. See Salcedo: op.cit., p. 484.

21. See Mesonero Romanos, Ramón de: Memorias de un Setentón, vol.2, Madrid 1881, p. 84.

22. See Cejador y Frauca, Julio: Hist. de la Lit. Cast., vol.7, Madrid 1917, p. 104.

years before Mis Ratos Perdidos (Mesonero's first efforts with the new genre) and a number of years before the Escenas Matritenses. It is evident that Cejador thought as did Chaves that the slight worth of these early articles did not merit their consideration.[23]

While Mesonero deserves a place in Spanish letters his fame has greatly suffered with the years. His articles give a faithful picture of the period in which he lived and as such are interesting to those who wish to reproduce the period. He always wielded his pen with a gentleness and mildness that would not permit ridicule of anything at the expense of anyone and his work does not have the lasting appeal and intrinsic merit of the incomparable satirist, Larra.[24]

In August of 1832, Larra published the first article of El Pobrecito Hablador, entitled ¿Quién es el público y dónde se encuentra? under the pseudonym of Don Juan Pérez de Munguía. It was his second attempt at the publication of a satirical periodical and although it lasted as long as El Duende, fourteen instead of five articles were published (between August 1832 and March

23. See Chaves: op. cit., p. 41.

24. See Blanco García: op. cit., pp. 333-334.

1833) when once more the vigorous censorship forced him to abandon his enterprise.

Mesonero was very sensitive on the point of whether he or Larra deserved credit for the innovation of the new genre. He says that modern critics have even gone so far in some instances as to assert that El Curioso Parlante (his pseudonym) "was the most worthy successor of Fígaro". And this in spite of the fact that Larra himself in at least two different articles mentions him as his predecessor.[25] Mesonero did not take into consideration Mis Ratos Perdidos which give him, as far as date of publication is concerned, a much greater claim to priority than his Escenas.

I have tried to give, in brief, the history of the development of the articles on social customs in Spain, giving due credit to the work of Zabaleta as the premature child of the new genre in Spain, taking into account the large influence of the French, with special credit to Jouy, and giving to Miñano the credit of being the first initiator, after Zabaleta. Then, because of the fact that most authorities do not take into consideration these early efforts (between 1820-1823) and

25. See Mesonero Romanos: op. cit., vol.2, p. 85.

also because it serves my purpose, I have traversed rather carefully the years 1828-1832 to establish, as it were, the right to precedence in the new genre of the three figures which so many sources take into account. I refer, of course, to Estébanez Calderón, Mesonero Romanos and Mariano José de Larra. Discounting the date 1822, as previously explained, it would seem that Larra deserves to rank first with his article, El Café, published in 1828. Lomba and Carmen de Burgos are of this opinion. But in all fairness, if we are to discount the earlier efforts of some it would seem that we should discount Larra's earlier efforts. Our chief justification in not doing so would be that even Larra's earliest efforts are so much better than any of the others and show so much more promise that they deserve more recognition. This in spite of the fact that Larra did not consider any of the articles published in El Duende Satírico worthy to be published in the first collection of his articles (1835).[26]

Blanco García says that he does not consider it much glory to be first among the initiators when it is evident that Larra as well as Mesonero appeared almost

26. See Piñeyro, Enrique: El Romanticismo en España, Paris n.d. (1904), p. 6.

simultaneously, not as inventors but as ones who wished to acclimate a genre born in another country.[27]

It would seem, therefore, that my study of origins, undertaken because of Larra's relationship to the new genre is neither useful nor pertinent as Larra is neither first nor last in point of chronological order of development. But I justify myself in two ways: first, the study affords a brief survey of the field in which Larra proposed to write, and second, it gives me the chance to say with others, not first in point of time, no, but first in literary merit.

Because of the fact that at least two different sources insist that Larra is hardly to be considered as a costumbrista it seems fitting to discuss the matter here before any further study is made. Mesonero Romanos states that "Larra's purpose was principally political satire whereas he always kept himself within the limits of gay and simple pictures of society in its normal state, trying by describing it to correct its defects with mildness."[28] It is hardly necessary to disprove this statement since

27. See Blanco García: op. cit., pp. 331-332.

28. Mesonero Romanos: op. cit., vol.2, p. 84.

obviously one cannot classify all of Larra's articles under the head of political satires. Quoting Miss McGuire: "one can afford to smile at Mesonero's apparent self-satisfaction when he contrasts his temperament with Larra's for time has proved that Larra's effortless writings are to him a monument more lasting than that of any of his associates who lived out their normal lives."[29] Carmen de Burgos on the chapter entitled El crítico in her work on Larra, states that "Larra is not a costumbrista but a critic since when he writes of customs it is but to criticize them. In his criticisms of customs he excells admirably. He is neither a good nor a bad costumbrista for he is not a costumbrista even though he himself believed he was, as he says in his criticism of Mesonero Romanos' Panorama Matritense. His articles are not descriptions in whose exactness is to be found the merit of the costumbrista."[30]

Carmen de Burgos is not wrong in her assertions if we take into consideration her definition of a costumbrista, i.e., a literary photographer; never

29. See McGuire: op.cit., p. 91.

30. Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., p. 115.

a critic. Such a definition would certainly limit and narrow the field of the costumbrista and furthermore is not in keeping with the general concensus of opinion. One might better subdivide the types of cuadros de costumbres, putting in one group those articles that merely faithfully portray any social custom, and into the other those which criticize or satirize social customs. Such a division would at least be useful as one of the means to differentiate between the articles of Mesonero and Larra.

Before a detailed study is made of the costumbrista, it will be better perhaps to give a brief, biographical sketch in order to see what manner of man Don Mariano José de Larra was.

CHAPTER I.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

Don Mariano José de Larra was born in Madrid, March 24, 1809,[31] in La Casa de la Moneda where his grandfather, Don Antonio Crispín de Larra, held the past of administrator. His father was Don Mariano de Larra y Langelot, a very illustrious physician of the day who favored the French regime. His mother was Doña María de los Dolores Sánchez de Castro, a woman of Portuguese descent.

La Casa de la Moneda where Larra spent the first five years of his life was in a secluded spot in the city of Madrid.[32] The year 1808, which

31. Don Narcisco Alonso Cortés in Un dato para la biografía de Larra in Viejo y Nuevo, 1915 (cited by Salcedo), published the baptismal certificate of Larra taken from the University files at Valladolid. This document gives March 24th as date of Larra's birth. Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., pp. 18-19, also gives the date as March 24th. Her sister found his birth certificate, filed under M (instead of L), in the Parish of Almudena. Larra also gives March 24th as the date of his birth in his article La Noche Buena de 1836. Chaves: op.cit., p. 25, gives March 26th but he was unable to find the birth certificate. March 24th seems conclusive.

32. See Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., p. 21.

had seen the atrocity of the Dos de Mayo, was barely passed. The year 1811 was one of famine. The life of the majority of those in Madrid was monotonous and uneventful. No one read anything. The loyal ones refused to read anything that was published under French influence. Naturally, great ignorance and illiteracy prevailed. The children were subjected to the severest regime. They rarely ate with their elders, were allowed to listen but not to speak. They were taught much useless knowledge, much religion and were left in the care of servants most of the time. In such an atmosphere Larra spent his early childhood. There is a legend that he learned to read at eighteen months(!) and at the age of three read perfectly. He was at all events a very precocious child, and his natural precocity was pushed at every turn.[33] At the literary Tertulias of the Larra family he achieved his first triumphs.[34]

Larra's father, although a cultured and intelligent man, was eccentric and capricious. Unlike the rest of the family, who were very patriotic, he

33. Idem, pp. 23-24.

34. Nombela: op.cit., p. 36.

was sympathetic to Joseph Bonaparte and held the post of army physician in the latter's forces for a number of years. In 1813, due to the French evacuation, he found it necessary to leave Spain if he were to continue in the service of the French army.[35] Larra was put in a College in Bordeaux where he remained for over five years. There he learned to read and write French as if it were his native language. In fact he almost forgot his own tongue, which is not strange, when one considers that he was not allowed to speak Spanish while there.[36] Besides the more or less elementary education he received at Bordeaux he was taught the natural sciences and other practical things out of his father's experiences.[37]

In 1818 Larra's father took advantage of an amnesty to return to Spain and Larra was put in the parochial school of San Antonio Abad. Here he studied the classics as well as his mother tongue. He enjoyed studying so much that he disliked all kinds of games.

35. Salcedo Ruiz: op. cit., p. 484.

36. Nombela: op. cit., pp. 37-38.

37. Cortés, C.: Biography in Obras Completas de Larra, Barcelona 1886, p. II.

The only recreation he indulged in was an occasional game of chess with his friend, the Conde de Robles.[38]

The instability of Larra's father's position hindered the continuance of his education. From the school of San Antonio Abad Larra went to the village of Corella (in Navarre) where his father now practiced. As there was no college in Corella Larra began reading everything on which he could lay his hands.[39] During the years 1822-23 he translated various passages from a French version of the Iliad. He also worked on a Spanish grammar.[40] In October of 1823 he was again in Madrid where he matriculated in El Colegio Imperial, a Jesuit school. He took a course in Mathematics and at the same time studied Typewriting and Political Economy in the classes of the Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País.[41] In 1824 he entered the University of Valladolid with the idea of becoming a lawyer. He was encouraged in this by his father who wished him to choose a profession.[42] His

38. Ibidem.

39. Salcedo: op.cit., p. 485.

40. Cortés: op. cit., p. IV.

41. Salcedo: ubi supra, p. 485.

42. Cortés: ubi supra, p. IV.

father was practicing medicine at this time in Valladolid.[43]

Although Larra was not a morose or melancholy youth he was not, on the other hand, mirthful or full of the usual boyish enthusiasm. His precociousness and his natural pride and reserve prevented his enjoying a normal boyhood. Always serious and thoughtful, he had not seemed to care to rub elbows with his fellows. His world so far had been the world of books. But there came a sudden change. Actual personal contacts with life burst upon him with the "mysterious happening" of 1825 which apparently did so much to alter his mind. Carmen de Burgos says it was more than a mere unfortunate love affair which might easily have been forgotten, that it was the discovery that he was in love with the mistress of his own father which disillusioned him and awakened in him a sense of bitterness which he never overcame.[44]

Most of Larra's biographers claim that from this time date all his misfortunes. It is true that he suddenly left the University of Valladolid and matriculated in that of Valencia but whether this change was due

43. Salcedo: ubi supra, p. 485.

44. Carmen de Burgos: op. cit., p. 40.

to the "happening" is not definitely known.[45] Shortly after matriculation at Valencia he received an order from his father to return to Madrid where a governmental post awaited him. But he was not meant for routine work and 1827 saw him starting out in earnest the career of a writer.[46] His first encouragement in this field came with the recognition given his Oda a la Exposición de la Industria Española del año 1827. The poem has no particular merit but served to encourage the young writer to continue in the field to which he felt irresistibly drawn.

Larra, stimulated by this recognition, encouraged by friends, and imbued with the spark of genius, produced early in 1828[47] the first article of a periodical entitled El Duende Satírico del Día.[48]

The years 1828-29 were dark days for Spain and Larra's publication was short-lived. At first the public read his articles with indifference but soon they

45. Chaves: op.cit., p. 21.

46. Idem, p. 23.

47. Chaves: Idem, p. 24, gives the date as May 1828; Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., p. 95, gives March; Lomba (see Note 14, p. VI): op.cit., p.20, gives January or February. Miss McGuire: op.cit., p. 94, gives March; Nombela, op.cit., p.53, merely gives year '28.

48. See Chaves: ubi supra.

began to gain more attention until finally certain influential persons, seeing themselves ridiculed, succeeded in causing its suspension, after five numbers had appeared, in August, 1829. For a time Larra devoted himself to poetry, taking chiefly for subject matter things of the times. His Oda a los Terremotos de Murcia has some merit but shows clearly that Larra was not born to be a poet.[49] One could hardly say with Galdós, however, that "it is the worst thing that has ever been written in Spanish".[50]

In August, 1829 Larra married Doña Josefa Wetoret y Velasco. The marriage was opposed by his father who felt it to be somewhat premature.[51] Larra was only twenty, and hardly in a position to support himself, much less a wife. The young man, forced to earn a living by means of his pen, chose the dramatic field, which though not very remunerative was the best that presented itself. Bretón and Gil y Zárate maintained themselves by writing plays and so might he.[52]

In 1831 Larra's comedy, No más mostrador, was presented in Madrid with great success. Contrary to the

49. Idem, pp. 25-26.

50. Pérez Galdós, B.: Los Apostólicos in Episodios Nacionales, Madrid 1893, p. 55.

51. See Chaves: op.cit., p. 29.
52. See Piñeyro: op.cit., p. 6.

opinion at that time and one held by the Marqués de Molins a half century later, the work is not original, aothough some of the passages are. It is from two French plays, one by E. Scribe and the other by Michel Dieulafoy.[53]

Mesonero Romanos organized a famous literary club, El Parnasillo, which held its meetings in El Café del Príncipe from 1831-1839. All the literary minds of the time met here at one time or another.[54] Here Larra gained his reputation for sarcasm. Few people understood him and although they did not sympathize with his peculiar disposition they admired his talent as well as feared his tongue.[55]

In August of 1832 Doña Cristina of Naples took the reins of government in hand owing to the illness of Fernando VII. She was the fourth wife of the despotic king and an encouraging contrast to the third wife, Doña Amalia of Saxony. The latter was indifferent to the times and lived a life of deep seclusion, interested only in religion and poetry. Doña Cristina during the four

53. Idem, p. 7.

54. See Chaves: op.cit., p. 38.

55. See Nombela y Campos: op. cit., p. 64.

years of her life as Fernando's wife did much to endear herself to the people by softening her husband's heart and by instituting various reforms. It is a pity that she later turned against the liberals who were aiding her to procure the throne for her daughter, Isabel II, and thus lost the affection and trust of the masses.[56]

Larra saw in the regency of Queen Cristina the dawn of a new era for literary production. Thinking also that the censorship under the new minister, Cea Bermúdez, would permit a freer expression of thought than under Calomarde he began the publication of El Pobrecito Hablador under the pseudonyms Don Juan Pérez de Munguía and Andrés Niporesas. The first issue came out in August of 1832 and articles continued to appear at irregular intervals until March of the following year. Each number was at least twenty-five pages in length.[57] The articles were, in the main, satires on manners. In them Larra dares to paint a picture of oppressed Spain with her intellectual decadence, her backwardness and her miseries. He was very careful not to offend, openly, any public officials or the government directly. Only the most suspicious could take offense at his veiled remarks. He had the happy faculty of telling much in generalities.[58]

56. See Chaves: op. cit., pp. 35-36.

57. See McGuire: op. cit., p. 94.
58. See Cortés: op. cit., pp. IV-V.

But in spite of his well covered criticisms, Larra's publication fell into disfavor with the censorship. With the fourteenth issue he grew tired of the struggle and in March of 1833 publication was suspended with the announcement of the death of the author.[59]

With the death of Fernando in September, 1833 and the acclamation of his daughter, then only three years old, as queen, came the beginning of the Carlist wars. The king's younger brother, Carlos, who just before the former's death took refuge in Portugal, showed by his silence as well as his associates that he had designs on the throne, that he wished to disregard by arms, if necessary, the Royal Decree, going back to the ancient Salic law and Bourbon tradition to prove his right.[60] The atrocities and horrors of the next seven years in the fight against Napolean have gone down in history as among the bloodiest and heart-breaking of all times.[61] There were many who from the first moment of the struggle realized how vital for the future was the solving of the political problem that circumstances had planted. Larra

59. Idem, p. V.

60. See Piñeyro: op. cit., pp. 36-37.

61. Idem, p. 37.

was one of these.[62]

Fernando's death was opportune for the good of Larra's further literary production. Between the months of March and September he had contented himself with articles on the theater, manners and literary subjects but with the king's death conditions changed and he launched into the field of political satire. Such articles as Nadie pase sin hablar al portero, La planta nueva and La Junta de Castel-o-branco are representative of his genius in this field.[63] Larra was a most sincere liberal. He desired political rights for the people and believed in human progress and social perfection. He realized, however, that the Spanish people as a whole were not ready to receive all the rights and privileges due them, that the educated few must learn first and teach the rest.[64] In his articles on the Carlist wars appearing in La Revista Española under the pen name Fígaro he gives a very perfect picture of Spain from September 1833 to August 1835.[65] He saw clearly the horrors of the civil war and he censured severely the doings of Cea Bermúdez and the later indecision of Martínez de la Rosa. He makes fun of those who direct

62. Idem, p. 38.

63. See Cortés: op. cit., p. VI.

64. See Piñeyro: op. cit., p. 39.

65. See Chaves: op. cit., p. 52.

the government for not finding a solution for the civil conflict. In all he presents himself as a worthy fighter, who only moves his pen because of the noble desire to see his country freed from so many evils, because he wished to break down the obstacles which opposed her happiness and because he wished to give a fighting chance to the many who were being exploited and impoverished for the benefit of the few.[66]

While censorship was more lax in the first years of the Carlist Wars it was far from being liberal and Larra was still forced to write principally articles on Manners and criticisms of dramatic works. El Doncel de Don Enrique, el Doliente, Larra's only work in the field of the novel, appeared in 1834. It shows the influence of Walter Scott in exterior form but the plot is his own and characters and episodes are entirely Spanish. The book shows that the author has studied the general history of Spain and Europe during the latter part of the fourteenth century and the first part of the fifteenth with great care. Larra was not an archeologist nor a curio collector, as was Scott, but his novel offers proof of his having read with care poets, chroniclers and writers of the age.[67] Chaves sees, as do many others,

66. Idem, p. 54.

67. See Piñeyro: op. cit., p. 18.

the similarity between the emotional life of Larra and that of the Galician bard, Macías, hero of Larra's novel.[68] It is hard, perhaps, to reconcile the author of literary satires with the author of El Doncel." But the inner sadness of the satires show the soul of the real Larra if one looks deep enough just as much, perhaps as the sorrowful speeches of Macías."[69]

Between July 1834 and April 1835, Larra also wrote for El Observador, a liberal daily founded July 15, 1834.[70]

On September 24, 1834, Larra's Macías was presented in Madrid. It was a historical drama in four acts and bears the distinction of being Spain's first original romantic drama in verse. Its hero is the same as in El Doncel and although perhaps inferior to El Doncel it was very well received at the time.[71]

Besides this original drama Larra continued his adaptations and translations from French originals. Plagiarisms were common even among the more serious writers, partly due to the fact that producers paid just as much

68. See Chaves: op. cit., pp. 61-62.

69. Idem, p. 66.

70. Idem, p. 57.

71. See Piñeyro: op. cit., p. 21.

for a translation as for an original piece of work. Larra's Arte de Conspirar, an adaptation from one of E. Scribe's best works, in 1835 under the pseudonym Ramón Arriala is perhaps his best translation not excepting Roberto Dillón (1831).[72] Partir a tiempo(1835), a translation from the same French author,is of much less importance.[73]

In February of 1835 Larra published the first collection of his articles, twenty-three in number, dramatic, literary, political and articles of manners, which had been published during the years 1832-34 in El Pobrecito Hablador, La Revista Española and El Observador. The book although only a hundred and ninety-three pages in length was well received due to Larra's great popularity.[74] In March appeared the second volume, containing thirty-three articles, four of which had never been published. In April the third volume was issued and in 1837 two additional volumes came out, shortly after the death of the author.[75]

The political situation grew worse in Spain and while some saw, as did Larra, the ultimate downfall of the

72. See Chaves: op. cit., p. 78.

73. Idem, p. 79.

74. Idem, pp. 83-84.

75. Idem, p. 84.

rebellion, it was prolonged due to the irresoluteness and cautiousness of those in whom the power to act was vested as well as a general inefficiency in the army and lack of resources.[76] Larra grew tired of the long struggle and in April, 1835 left Madrid by way of Extremadura and went to Portugal. From there he crossed to London, then went to Brussels and thence to France where he passed the greater part of 1835.[77]

It is necessary to pause a moment in this survey of the events in Larra's short life to mention the great passion which filled his heart, mind and soul during the last few years of his existence. Shortly after his marriage to Pepita Wetoret he had met at a Tertulia of his friends, a Dolores Armijo, who though married was a shameless coquette and whose chief pleasure was to surround herself with a flock of admiring suitors. Dolores never loved Larra but she was a flirt and fickle and it flattered her vanity to think of herself as the beloved of Fígaro.[78] She had not counted on the depth of Larra's ardor, however, and felt herself obliged to flee

76. See Piñeyro: op. cit., p. 21.

77. Idem, p. 43.

78. See Gonzalo-Ruano, César: Larra, Madrid 1924, p. 75.

to Extremadura to escape his attentions. He pursued her but returned to Madrid, unable to persuade her to flee with him.[79]

Most of Larra's biographers say that Larra's reason for leaving Spain was more to distract his mind from his own unhappiness than to find surcease from the internal strife in Spain. Perhaps this passion which was consuming his soul, causing him to forget home, family, everything, might grow less intense with separation and the passage of time.[80]

In France he had the opportunity to meet Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas of the Romantic School as well as many other literary men and to appreciate the great intellectual movement in France. While in Paris he was asked to write in French the text for an illustrated trip through Spain which was entitled Voyage pittoresque en España, en Portugal, et sur la côte d'Afrique de Tanger a Tetouan. He was paid three thousand francs for writing it.[81]

Larra returned to Spain in December of 1835. To this return we owe three delightful political articles: Fígaro de Vuelta, Buenas Noches and Dios nos asista. The

79. Idem, pp. 75-76.

80. See Chaves: op. cit., p. 85.

81. Idem, pp. 86-88.

three form a series of historical as well as literary interest which will always be read with pleasure by all those who know or study Castillian.[82]

Much has been said about the origen of the enmity between Bretón de los Herreros and Larra. On Dec. 21, 1835, Bretón's Me Voy de Madrid was first played and the protoganist was presented in such a way that it left little doubt in the minds of the audience as to whom it referred. The hero is represented as trying to seduce a married woman. His character and his manner of living are harshly condemned. Threatened by enemies and debtors he has fled from the capitol.[83] The credulous public saw Larra in every phase of the drama and the success of the play was heightened by this personal element. Some months before this, however, (April 1834) Larra had criticized in La Revista Española a drama of Bretón's entitled Un Novio para la Niña. But it would hardly seem as if this criticism, perfectly impartial as it was, would constitute a just cause for Bretón's startling denunciation. In fact, Larra even mentions in his article that the poet is a friend of his. Chaves, as well as others, seems to think

82. Piñeyro: op.cit., p. 43.

83. See Chaves: op.cit., p. 88.

that whatever injury Bretón may have felt from this criticism was certainly not sufficient for such a treacherous thing as Me Voy de Madrid.[84]

Larra arrived in Madrid the first of January, 1836 and began the new year by writing political and literary articles for the periodical El Español (founded Nov. 1835).[85] The Spain to which he returned was not the same as the one he left. The men in power were obstinately opposed to giving any liberties to those who demanded them and paid little attention to popular agitation. Combined with this reactionary tendency came a lack of discipline in the army. This was a fatal thing as the Royal Army was needed to maintain order in the rest of the country. Militarism began to impose itself upon Spain Aug. 12, 1836, not to be interrupted for forty years. On this day the troops quartered in La Granja, the summer home of the Royal family, penetrated the palace and forced the queen to proclaim the Constitution of 1812 and form a new parliament. The affair of La Granja divided the defenders of the throne into two irreconciliable factions and convinced Larra that the regeneration of his country by means of liberty was impossible where militarism could

84. Idem, pp. 88-90.

85. Idem, pp. 90-91.

so insolently and victoriously overthrow everything. His article, El Día de difuntos de 1836, portrays clearly the desperate situation in which he felt Madrid to be.[86]

Three days before the uprising of La Granja, Larra's appointment to the deputyship of the province of Avila had been approved through the influence of the Duque de Rivas. It is rather strange, perhaps, that such a post would have appealed to Larra but Dolores Armijo,who was the wife of the governor, lived there and this would seem to be reason enough.[87] Larra of course lost the position with the Liberal's triumph and once more deep gloom and despair settled upon him. His country as well as his life were doomed and he could see no salvation for either.

From September,1836 until his death Larra again turned to literature, writing chiefly, literary criticisms. His articles appeared in El Español, La Revista-Mensajero, El Mundo (a daily founded June, 1836) and El Redactor General (a periodical favoring Isabel II, first appearing Nov. 15, 1836). He was to write six articles a month for El Redactor General and one a week for El Mundo as per contracts drawn up Nov. 28, 1836.[88]

86. See Piñeyro: op. cit., pp. 44-45.

87. See Gonzalo-Ruano: op. cit., p. 71.

88. See Chaves: op. cit., Note 80, p. 186.

The works of Larra written in the last few months of 1836 have interest chiefly because of their biographical character. By studying them one divines the sad state to which his unfortunate passion has carried him.[89] Especially do we note an echo of his own despair in his article Necrología (Jan. 1837) occasioned by the sudden death of the youth Campo-Alanje. He writes with the weariness of a man of eighty with one foot in the grave. It is unfortunate that Larra lived in the period he did for it but added to his natural somberness and reserve and we see how everything worked toward bringing about his untimely end. Sarcastic and short in his manner, he easily created enemies and he was too proud to apologize. His unfortunate disposition made compatibility with an unsympathetic wife impossible.[90] Since the birth of his third child, a daughter, Larra and his wife had lived apart, although he continued to contribute to her support and from time to time invited his children to come and dine with him in his room on the second floor of Santa Clara Street, Madrid.[91] There is no evidence, however, that Larra had any par-

89. Idem, p. 103.

90. See Piñeyro: op. cit., pp. 46-47.

91. See Chaves: op. cit., p. 118.

ticular affection for his children, and most of his biographers seem to think that his marriage was but a chapter apart in the short course of his stormy life.[92]

One of Larra's notable translations, appearing late in 1836, was made from the work of the eminent French philosopher, Lammenais. He called it El Dogma de los hombres libres. It is a fine piece of work and the prologue is well worthy of Larra.[93] His criticism of Hartzenbusch's Los Amantes de Teruel is one of the finest articles of literary criticism ever written in Spain.[94] This is the last serious article of criticism that he wrote. His Diccionario de Sinónimos begun in the last months of 1836 might have been of great merit but it was never completed.[95]

Larra's despair grew and he wrote a letter to his beloved pleading for mercy. She did not answer and he became even more despondent. Then came Dolores' letter asking for an interview and once more the sun seemed to shine upon the unhappy man. The date set for the interview was Feb. 13, 1837.[96]

92. See Carmen de Burgos: op. cit., pp. 224-241.

93. See Chaves: op. cit., p. 99.

94. Idem, p. 113.

95. Idem, pp. 113-115.

96. Idem, p. 115.

González-Ruano[97] gives a very realistic and dramatic picture of the last day of Larra's life, his indifference before receiving Dolores' letter, the change it made in him, his visit to Mesonero to see about his collaboration in a prospective drama with Quevedo as protagonist, his visit to his publisher, to his wife, his unusual cheerfulness followed by the bitterness that came when he discovered that all Dolores wanted was her letters and to say goodbye forever, the sound of the fatal shot immediately following her retreating footsteps and lastly the pathetic picture of Larra's three year old daughter being the first to find her father's prostrate form.

Larra's death caused a profound stir in Madrid and his funeral, arranged and paid for by literary friends and admirers will go down in the history of Spanish letters. The scene at the cemetery is of particular importance for the appearance of a new literary light, Don José Zorrilla y Moral (1817-1893), a young man of eighteen who had composed some verses in Larra's memory. The incident might be compared to the refrain "The king is dead. Long live the king!"[98] For certainly out of the sepulcher of the un-

97. Op. cit., pp. 79-82.

98. See Piñeyro: op. cit., p. 50.

fortunate Larra arose the figure of the great poet Zorrilla, phoenix-like in its youth and vigor and bringing a new message to fill the void of the one who

"Acabó su misión sobre la tierra,
Y dejó su existencia carcomida,
Como una virgen al placer perdida
Cuelga el profano velo en el altar." [99]

99. Chaves: op. cit., pp. 235-236.

CHAPTER II.

ARTICLES ON MANNERS.

A difficulty which attaches itself to any discussion of Larra's articles on manners is the fact that his subjects are so varied and numerous that a segregation of them into some sort of classification is all but impossible. Azorín[100] partly surmounts this difficulty by making an alphabetical list of the things which Larra criticizes, ranging from "actors to wines" and gives a short discussion of each particular thing censored, together with one or more direct quotations from the articles. Yxart[101] and Lomba[102] have made collections of Larra's articles representative of the different kinds of subject matter. Neither collection, however, pretends to be complete. Lomba has made his selection with an eye toward showing the gradual development of Larra's genius in the

100. Azorín (José Martínez Ruiz): Rivas y Larra, Madrid 1916.

101. Yxart, J.: Prologue to Colección de Artículos Escogidos de Mariano José de Larra, Biblioteca Clásica Española, Barcelona 1885.

102. Op. cit.

new genre. He has, therefore, included three of his earlier articles, appearing in El Duende (1828), viz: El Café, Corridas de Toros and Correspondencia del Duende. In this respect his collection is the most complete.[103] As far as I know, Lomba is the only one who has done this. In fact a number of critics consider them such feeble attempts that they have failed to concede that Larra wrote anything worthy of mention before the year 1832.[104]

While it may be argued that the works of Larra have a unified entity and to appreciate their full worth should be studied entire, it is generally agreed that his articles offer an obvious classification into three types: articles on manners; political satires; literary and dramatic criticisms.[105] The classification is loose, however, for a number of articles lie on the border line whereas others do not seem to fall under any of the three heads. This applies in particular to his philosophical articles.[106]

It is true that much of the social life of the country is reflected in Larra's political satires and even

103. See Lomba: op. cit., p. 10.

104. See Yxart: op. cit., p. V.

105. See Lomba: op. cit., pp. 7-8.

106. Filología in Obras, pp. 24-25; Las Palabras, idem, pp. 340-341; Las Circunstancias, idem, pp. 307-308.

in his dramatic criticisms one glimpses satirical pictures of society and its foibles. Therefore to confine the discussion solely to the clear-cut articles on manners is to narrow the scope of the subject, in the interest of greater completeness. In so far as it is possible, this discussion will lie within the realm of the social satire as portrayed in his articles on manners.

Something of the moral and political condition of the Spain in which Larra lived has already been given, with the purpose of explaining in part the necessity for his extreme caution and cleverness in anything he desired to write about the society of the day. Perhaps in less rigorous times he would not have become so satirical. He would not have needed to say one thing and mean another. "His genius was born, in part, from the spirit of the times."[107] But this is almost beside the point. Every period has its genius and one might just as well say that Cervantes owes his greatness to the fact that the tales of Chivalry were over abundant when he wrote the Quijote.

If there is anything in Spain open to censure that Larra has not criticized it is relatively small and unimportant. His articles run the gamut of the social evils and vices in the Court, the Church, the home. And he does not

107. Guerra, Angel: La Ironía de Fígaro in La España Moderna, Madrid Oct.1907, p. 7.

confine himself to Spain. Civilization in general comes in for its share of railing in his very humorous article entitled La Calamidad Europea.[108] France and England are often cited with favorable implication as well as criticized. In his Carta a un viajero Inglés[109] one reads a most delightful, amusing article which seems to have the purpose of excoriating unmercifully a certain intrepid Englishman in particular and perhaps the country in general for its impertinent interest in and assumed large knowledge of Spain's affairs. Larra cannot help making the usual thrust at the Englishman's habit of drinking freely. Quoting from the Englishman's tirade against Spain (which he had never visited) in which he informs the Spaniards that "it is necessary to drink deep from the founts of knowledge in order to progress," Larra replies that "when it comes to a matter of drinking it is necessary for the Spaniards of both hemispheres to take off their hats to the Englishman, wherever he may be."[110] Strictly speaking, however, his articles on manners deal with contemporary life in Spain, particularly in Madrid, and it is to this group that I wish to confine myself.

108. Obras, pp. 374-376.

109. Foulché-Delbosc,R.: Cuatro Artículos de D. Mariano José de Larra in Revue Hispanique, vol.3.4,Paris 1896, pp. 318-322; also Obras, pp. 892-894.

110. Foulché-Delbosc,R.: op. cit., p. 319.

For the purposes of a detailed discussion this group lends itself to a two-fold division: life in the Court and life in the home. Let us turn to the life of the Court. By so doing it will be possible to go from the general to the particular, from the broad, universal faults and foibles to the petty and more individual ones. By "Court",one understands of course, the city of Madrid , with its moral as well as physical characteristics. The political situation will not be treated.

Mesonero Romanos, perhaps as much as any other, has given in his Panorama Matritense[111] a picture of the physical and more apparent moral aspects of Madrid. Estébanez Calderón has done the same for the Andalusian provinces in his Escenas Andaluzas.[112] What has Larra done? He has not been satisfied with the outer crust but, with the precision of a surgeon, he has probed underneath the surface and laid bare the very vitals. He has cut with a clean sweep and an unfaltering hand and has not rested until the whole truth has been revealed. It is not always a self-evident truth but the skillful eye recognizes it if it but casts aside the satirical cloak.

111. Madrid 1881.

112. Madrid 1883.

Larra has always been a satirist and at first he took his calling in great seriousness. He railed at the theater, the actors, the cafes, the censorship, the bull fights, etc., ad infinitum with all the fervor and zest of a young radical who, seeing so many evils on all sides, grows hysterical in his attempts to upbraid all of them. He is never quite amiable but in the earlier articles he writes with an enthusiasm which shows that he thought there was a remedy for the prevailing evils. Later we note his change of thought and we see him laughing at his previous seriousness, although his laughter is always forced and often bitter. He seems to have no hope whatever for Madrid's future as we observe in his article El Día de Difuntos de 1836.[113] In fact, everything he wrote during the last six months of his life shows this sort of hopeless pessimism and bitter satire which knows no mercy in its denunciation any more than it sees any hope for a betterment of the things it denounces.

Nearly everything one reads is colored by the imagination of its author. If one is to get the author's viewpoint he must view the picture through his lens. A history may be a faithful picture of a certain period or historical event and yet even the historian is apt to

113. Obras, pp. 536-539.

color his narrations with his own opinions. In Literature such coloring is often to be desired and the reader's reaction depends more or less on just how the author has presented the picture. Larra's earlier articles ¿Quién es el público,[114] El Castellano Viejo,[115] Empeños y Desempeños,[116] and others are satirical but not bitter, and while denunciatory they are written in a more jovial vein. On the other hand, La Noche Buena de 1836,[117] Necrología,[118] and El Día de Difuntos de 1836,[119] present a picture so hopeless, so black, so full of despair, that the reader is bound to get a darker view than circumstances justify.

Larra arouses varying emotions; humor, sadness, anger, indignation, joy, depression, gayety, pessimism, hope, despair. His talent is one from which everyone but its possessor may derive great pleasure. Our optimists tell us our good traits; our pessimists our bad. Which do the more good? Fígaro loved his country but he was

114. Idem, pp. 3-6.

115. Idem, pp. 35-40.

116. Idem, pp. 15-18.

117. Idem, p. 548-552.

118. Idem, pp. 557-559.

119. Idem, pp. 536-539.

not blind to her faults. He was constantly telling her about them. It is not surprising that he found so much to censure, considering the times. Spain needed several Fígaro's to rouse her to action. In one of his best known articles, Vuelva Usted Mañana[120] one gets a very vivid picture of the lackadaisical, careless manner in which his countrymen carried on their business affairs. That it is a more or less faithful picture there is no doubt for Vuelva Usted Mañana has always been a by word in official circles.

Larra's respect for France did not amount to disloyalty toward Spain. His was merely the broader vision. It is not always those that shout the loudest who are the most patriotic. There is such a thing as foolish pride in one's country, or let us say, a blond and ignorant pride. The nations which have had the desire to progress have followed the example of those that stood in the front rank.[121] It is not patriotism, necessarily to turn the cold shoulder to the foreigner. Larra seemed to feel keenly the lack of hospitality accorded the French in Spain, especially to those who went there with the purpose of making it their home. The foreigner who settles in Spain

120. Idem, pp. 52-56.

121. Idem, p. 55.

risks in it his fortune. He puts into circulation a new capital, he contributes to society with his talent and money. If he loses, he is a hero; if he wins it is quite right that he receive the reward for his work since he has paid for it. Contrary to the general opinion he has not come to take out money. On the contrary he has come to establish his home in a land which within six years he will call his own. His dearest interests and his family bind him to the new country that he has adopted. He acquires an affection for the place where he has made his fortune. His sons are Spaniards and his grandsons will be. Instead of taking away wealth he has deposited it. Nearly all the nations of the world recognize the importance of the foreigner to the growth of the country. "What country", says Larra, "demonstrates this better than the United States." He even goes so far as to say that France has owed, in a great measure, her high state of advancement to her great hospitality.[122]

Spain has always been a proud nation and to this pride one must attribute in part her previous inability to keep step with the other nations of the world. Fígaro was referring to this fact when he said that "Such is the pride

122. Ibidem.

of man that he would rather declare in a loud voice that things are incomprehensible when he does not understand them than to confess that his inability to understand has been through sheer mental laziness."[123]

It is not possible to get a complete picture of life in Madrid from Larra's articles any more than is it possible to get a complete idea of a country from one visit. One gets an idea here and an impression there and it is the reader's task to piece them together into some sort of a comprehensive whole. And the best craftsman will omit some of the details.

Life in the Court.

The Madrid of Larra's day was a turbulent one. Torn by internal strife, full of intrigues, harassed by public debts, buffeted about by a long line of rapidly changing, inefficient ministers, it is little wonder that the thinking few were sick at heart over their country's future. It was "every one for himself and the devil take the hindmost." Those in whose hands the power of government was vested, either did not know how or else were too interested in their own individual security and advancement to try to better prevailing conditions. The situation, both politically and socially was a sorry one and Larra

123. Idem, p. 52.

continually wielded his pen in vigorous protest.

There are two distinct pictures to be drawn of the social strata of the day: a picture of the down-trodden, ignorant masses and their miseries, and a picture of the indolent, frivolous and unthinking upper class Madrileños. It is the latter picture Larra drew for us, not because he forgot the masses and their poverty but because he believed the remedy for the social evils depended upon those who were endowed with more of life's natural talents as well as its material wealths. It is to be noted, however, that he did believe in class distinctions. He was never a Socialist. He would consider it impertinent for any member of the servant class to wish to converse with him in a friendly manner and for a hod carrier or common laborer to dare to stop him to ask for a light would be to show a gross lack of breeding.[124] This aristocratic tendency, however, did not make him any less vindicative in his criticisms of the social life of the capitol.

The Life of the Madrileño in general.

The life of the young Madrileño was a full one. Most of the morning in bed, an afternoon of calls, or a

124. Idem, p. 365.

ride in the park, a dinner at some fashionable café, an evening at the theater, followed by dancing, drinking and late suppers and an occasional tête a tête with some countess or other social butterfly comprised his usual daily itinerary.[125] He had no responsibilities and certainly did not ask for any. He had not the slightest conception of the value of money and a loan was nothing more to him than a timely gift.[126] He was a frequent visitor at the pawnshops, for even with the financial assistance of his friends he found it necessary at times to pawn his watch, his coat, his vest in order to hire a coach and buy a dinner for himself and feminine companion.[127]

Many heart-breaking stories have been woven about the articles to be found in a pawnshop. The casual visitor's heart fills with pity whenever he sees the breathless and hurried entrance of some one having an article to pawn. If it is a watch it represents the last gift of a mother to her son; if a dinner coat, a sure sign of the deep poverty of its heretofor wealthy owner; if a ring, the last hope of a young widow trying to support herself and family. But these stories, however vivid in the mind of the casual observer,

125. Idem, pp. 370-372.

126. Idem, p. 384.

127. Idem, p. 16.

are but illusions, for in nearly every case the articles have been oawned to obtain money for some social pleasure or folly.

The young Madrileño was not wholly ignorant of the things to be found in books and periodicals but he had only a smattering of many things and knew nothing well.[128] He read the headlines of the newspapers, if he had time, but rarely bothered to go further as they always said the same thing. In the words of Larra, "the newspapers were like the young men of Madrid - no difference except the name."[129] One grew sick and tired of hearing them reiterate how happy the Spaniards would be if they were free. It was like telling a blind man how wonderful it was to be able to see.[130] Perhaps one should compare the self-satisfied state of the Madrileño to that of a certain proud lady who imagined she progressed even though she did not. She subscribed to the Gazette of which she read every word but so slowly that in the year '29 she was reading the numbers issued in '23. And she was foolish enough to believe she was reading recent events.[131]

128. Idem, p. 15.

129. Idem, p. 370.

130. Idem, p. 371.

131. Idem, p. 13.

Writing was almost a lost art to the young Madrileño. Who invented it, anyway? Surely not the inhabitants of Madrid! And how much unhappiness had been caused by it! Which would be the greater crime, to destroy all the literature of the world or to commit countless atrocities and murders? The Madrileños got along very well without much reading or writing and believed much as the woman who said upon seeing another weep because she could not keep her boy in college: "Hush, foolish one; my son has never been in a college, and he, thank God, is well and happy".[132] About the only time the Madrileño needed to write was when he wished to order a new suit or to make an appointment with a young lady.[133]

He didn't see any use in the study of the Sciences, Languages or Mathematics. In answer to why he should not study Zoology, for instance, he would say: ¡Ay! Si viera Usted cuántos animales conozco ya![134] About all the mathematics he needed was to know how to add up the laundry-list and even this a servant could do and with less trouble to him.

132. Idem, p. 12.

133. Idem, p. 371.

134. Idem, p. 11.

His religious views were as yet unformed although every Sunday saw him going to church. Was not the church the sanctified theater to which all went to see and be seen? And was not one's religious fervor enhanced by elegant clothes and costly jewels? The young Madrileño went on this assumption and at no other time was he more carefully dressed than when attired for church.[135]

Amusements and Sports.

Spain has always been a somewhat monastic and individualistic nation. And especially has this been true of the upper classes. In Larra's day it was no different. Each person lived much within himself. Each had his own patio, his own home and his own small coterie of friends. Such a thing as civic pride and indiscriminate sociability with his fellows was unknown. Perhaps it was not so much that he wished to be unsocial; he merely had never learned to be otherwise. He did not know how to live the full and abundant life. He found his amusements among his own little group of friends. Public gatherings and a community spirit were not fostered. His perverted sense of aristocracy and his feeling

135. Idem, p. 4.

of superiority over his fellows strengthened his individualistic tendencies. There was no middle class; only an upper and a lower. And the latter were so uncultured and ignorant that they had no appreciation of or desire for works of art and higher forms of amusement and culture. The general public spent its Sundays in some public dance hall, often letting their revelries carry them to such heights that they would disturb a passing funeral procession.[136] Uneducated, with few wants, and these untutored, one easily sees whence came the audience for a bull fight.

On Monday "all" Madrid hurried to the ring as if they had only lived the other six days to be able to enjoy themselves on the seventh at a bullfight. Even the women attended and went away disappointed if they had not seen ten or twelve horses gored and the bull killed by the fighter who thus avenged the death of the horses. A few of Madrid's "finest" did not attend, considering it a barbarous function much beneath their dignity. Instead they visited the theater, the cafés or made calls, talking a jargon of French, Italian and even some Castilian, pretending to know all, but in

136. See Azorín: op. cit., pp. 147-148.

reality not much better off than those who attended the bullfights. The latter at least were sincere.[137]

How universal was the language of the Arena! A Chinaman could enjoy it as much as a Spaniard. Why should a man spend his life trying to make himself understood by the rest of the world when he could understand and be understood by all with only ten or twelve words at his command at a bullfight?[138]

There were few public parks in Madrid and these, little used. One occasionally took a drive through the Jardín de las Delicias[139] or met in the Jardín de Apolo[140] for a rendevous, but they were not used for public gatherings. The only time the masses got together was on Monday at the bullfights.

There was one time of the year at which it seemed El Mundo Todo es Máscaras.[141] This was the Carnival season just before the opening of Lent. Masked balls and social functions held undisputed sway all over the

137. See Larra, Mariano José de: Artículos de Costumbres, Clásicos Castellanos, vol.45, Madrid 1923, p. 35.

138. Idem, p. 36.

139. Obras, p. 344.

140. Ibidem.

141. Idem, pp. 57-62.

city. For a short time at least everyone seemed to brush elbows with his fellows. The usual scene in the ballroom was one of great revelry and hilarity. No one really danced but some got up in pairs and appeared to do so. Every one seemed to be looking for some one else. Mothers looked for daughters and husbands for wives, but no one ever saw a daughter looking for a mother nor a wife for a husband. Amorous intrigues walked unmolested under some masquerade disguise. There were many mistaken identities, especially when two different lovers happened to hit upon the same red cloak or tasseled cap as a means of recognition. Amusing incidents walked hand in hand with tragic ones. One young man followed a certain carriage nearly all one evening only to find that its occupant was the ugliest old hag in Madrid.[142]

What amusement did so many people get out of attending such functions? Was it, perchance a disordered appetite, that of finding oneself where others were? Was it to make themselves think they were happy for a night? Or was it that everyone wanted to carry on an intrigue or else have it appear that they did? One would be inclined to think the latter for on all sides could be heard: "Hush! for heaven's sake"; "Don't say he saw us!";"Will you be

142. Idem, pp. 57-58.

there?"; "Is it you?"[143]

The lack of amusements in the Capitol was proverbial. "The public either did not feel the inner need of amusing itself or else, like the wise men of old (whom it resembled) it amused itself with its own thoughts."[144] Much apparent joy and conviviality abounded in the Cafés and Restaurants. Here all gathered, young and old, rich and poor, fools and wise men. It mattered not if they had a home to go to where good food could be procured. It was the fashion to eat in a public café and the Madrileños obeyed its mandates with a promptness that admitted no deviations.

Perhaps it is just as true today as it was then that certain places, for some trivial reason, suddenly become fashionable and then just as suddenly lose favor. This caprice was especially noticeable in the Madrileño's slection of a place to eat. The service, the conveniences, the excellence of the food, the price were small considerations in his choice. In fact it seemed as if he sought after the ones that gave the poorest service. Where the crowd went was the determining factor. From time to time

143. Idem, p. 58.

144. Idem, p. 285.

and for no reason at all the favored restaurant changed. One month it would be La Estrella, another the Dos Amigos, still another El Café de Venecia, and again El Café del Príncipe.[145]

The chief accomplishment of the frequenters of the Cafés was killing time, although it rarely went by that name. Every tongue was glib and conversations pertaining to all walks of life could be heard. The theater, current events, at home and abroad, public finance, literary productions, the press, the clergy were discussed with a fluency that might have deceived an ignorant person into thinking that those who talked really knew what they were talking about. How easily the fate of the world was settled over a glass of rum or a couple of cigars; or perhaps one should say a dozen, for some were such inveterate smokers that had they been born before the discovery of tobacco they could never have existed.[146]

145. González-Ruano, César: op.cit., p. 31. In El Café del Príncipe, Larra and many other members of the famous literary club, El Parnasillo, gathered. Situated in front of the Plaza de Santa Ana near the Spanish theater, it was perhaps one of the very poorest cafés in Madrid, and yet in its day one of the most frequented.

146. See Larra, Mariano José de: Artículos de Costumbres, Clásicos Castellanos, vol.45, Madrid 1923, p. 5.

In the cafés, as elsewhere, were to be found the habitual spongers together with the rich young fools who fed them with quantities of frozen ices and who felt flattered when called upon to pay their bills. In exchange for this monetary assistance the spongers fed them flattery and insisted upon what good friends they were. As if friends were bought for a few drinks or a complimentary ticket to the theater.[147]

The lack of national sports was just as noticeable as the scarcity of amusements. Horse Racing, Swimming, Hunting, Fishing, Boating and many other pastimes which took up the spare hours of other nations were rarely indulged in. The chief indoor sport was billiards, a game which owed its great popularity to the fact that it did pass away time and also because one could whisper the latest scandal or discuss his newest conquest between plays.[148]

Hunting had been the sport of kings and noblemen but its vogue had declined with the increasing popularity of revolutions and social upheavals. In its stead came gambling, the café, the theater, dancing, amorous intrigues to take up the time of the man of leisure. It is to be noted, however, that in some regions around Extremadura hunting still held sway. The hunters were called corsairs

147. Idem, pp. 18-20.

148. Obras, p. 5.

and so wedded were they to the hunt that they cared for little else. As sportnmen in the true sense of the word, there was a certain sort of satisfaction in their life that one might very well envy. Devoid of ambition and other worldly passions, nothing hindered them from satisfying their passion because it, like that of love, was dominating. The hunter's gun was his friend always, even if it missed and his dog his inseparable companion, his wife.[149] But the hunter of Extremadura did not find his counterpart in Madrid. To the Madrileño the hunt was the chance to array himself in a splendid hunting outfit, and with gun in hand and mounted on a handsome steed, make a brilliant dash across the main parts of the city to see and be seen by the admiring populace. He rarely shot anything but on the other hand never returned home empty handed, always bringing a couple of birds or a rabbit he had bought

a casa
Volver, como suele el conde
De Toledo, vencedor.[150]

149. Idem, pp. 446-448.

150. Idem, p. 448.

The Theater.

The theater was one of the chief forms of amusement in Madrid in spite of its decadent state and the miserable conditions under which plays had to be performed as well as written. No one play, no one actor was to blame, but perhaps the retardation of art in general.[151] It was not sufficient to have a theater, poets and actors. None of these three could exist without the cooperation of the others, and with great difficulty could the three united exist without the help of a fourth factor, namely the public. And the fourth depended, in a large measure, upon the protection the government gave it.[152]

A public, indifferent to beauty, poorly and superficially educated, was one of the chief stumbling blocks to the advancement of the theater. When the poets saw the people applaud execrable dramas, not even dreaming that anything better might be written, they felt, no doubt, like repeating with Lope de Vega:

> Puesto que el vulgo es quien las paga, es justo
> Hablarle en necio para darle gusto.[153]

151. See Foulché-Delbosc: op.cit.,(vol.48) p. 317.

152. Obras, pp. 41-42.

153. Idem, p. 42.

But the dramatists were human and while wishing to produce works of art, with no incentive, no encouragement, and with translations, however poor, receiving more recognition than an original work, it was little wonder that they lowered their standards in accordance with the tastes of an ignorant and capricious public. Even the best ones commited the sin of plagiarism. Why not? The public never asked: "Who wrote it?" but rather said: "Entertain and amuse me." [154]

One of the very best ways for a person to make money in the writing field was to maintain an agent in Paris who would send a comedy of Scribe's[155] by every mail. Sometimes the mere possession of the play was not enough. One needed to know what a comedy was, to know the French theater and public, to know the Spanish theater and public, to be able to read French and to write Spanish. These accomplishments, however, were necessary only for good translations. A little audacity and a dictionary sufficed for a poor one, and the latter was more often made because it paid as well and took much less time and erudition.[156]

154. Idem, p. 271; p. 545.

155. Eugène Scribe, a French dramatist(1791-1861) whose works found much favor in Spain during the last century.

156. Obras, p. 496.

In few countries whose civilization was comparable was the theater more retarded than it was in Spain. The reasons for this retardation were, naturally, within the country itself. The government, who considered the theater an inevitable evil, and the public which was not interested in its welfare, were the two main stumbling blocks to its advancement. The public needed to have its interest awakened, to be educated sanely, religiously and temperately, and the rest of the problem would take care of itself. A rightly educated public would be bound to go in the right direction. But who was there to educate it? Did not the duty fall upon the men of talent, the writers, the poets? Had not nature endowed them with genius so that they might use it for the good of humanity? Was it not a sacred obligation which they dared not cast aside without bringing down upon themselves censure and ignominy? What if difficulties did present themselves? Was there not always a way out even in the darkest epoch? What if there were no works, no protection, no authors? The public could create them. And once a start was made progress was bound to come.[157]

The dramatists had only nominal copy-right privileges for their own works. Many times plays once given in

157. Idem, p. 43.

Madrid were produced in other parts of the country without the consent of the author. And what was worse, he was seldom given the credit of authorship. In such matters the producers followed the old adage: ¡La costumbre es ley! But so was the custom of thievery. Should all thieves, therefore, go free, because robbery was an old and tried custom? Could a bad custom ever become a good law?[158]

The conditions under which a play was produced were deplorable. Proper lighting, comfortable seats, good ventilation and sufficient stage properties — everything that the modern theater possesses —were lacking. The producers wanted to make as much money as possible and as the public was not particular they spent little or nothing on the things which a modern public demands without question.[159]

The establishment of a dramatic school by the government,[160] with a subsidy of six thousand reales for the founding of two chairs of declamation was a step toward the improvement of the profession. But

158. Idem, p. 44.

159. Idem, p. 45.

160. In 1830. See Salcedo: op. cit., p. 477.

it was only a very small one. For years actors had done more or less as they pleased and were autocratic toward authors as well as producers. If rebuffed for forgetting their lines they would say: "Pouf, what's the prompter for?" The public should be pleased to hear two people giving the same rôle."[161] If the actors didn't like the rôle as conceived by the author they interpreted it to suit their tastes. If the heroine had been born too many years ago the age was decreased to suit the actress' fancy. If the hero was fifty and bald and the one playing the rôle was thirty and handsome, he disregarded the author's intentions often to the point of making his appearance incongruous with the correct interpretation of the part.[162]

The authors realized, if the actors did not, that the latter needed to have more than a memory if they were to represent life and its various phases. But what incentive was there for the fostering of a professional spirit among them when the government practically regulated what a drama was worth beforehand while the public finished the job with the few plays the censorship passed. And likewise the critics, who might have stimulated the authors to better efforts, had to content themselves with

161. Obras, p. 487.

162. Idem, p. 45.

lauding the actors and praising the drama however bad the production might be.[163]

The producers not infrequently changed the title of a play, omitted scenes, cut here and added there, for surely they knew more than the poet about what the actor should say. When the author happened to be poor and unknown, which terms are synonymous, the comedy was produced under the name of some one who ranked well in the public eye, and everyone hailed it as a true work from the pen of Don Fulano de tal... What if he hadn't written the play? He could have; which was just the same.[164]

The actors had their grievances as well. They never knew when or how often a play would be hissed. A first night was a trying ordeal for both author and actors. The hissing was usually preceded by coughing, and woe to the author who thought a general fit of coughing merely meant an epidemic of colds or influenza.[165] Often the performance was not even completed. Which reminds one of the story of the French comedian whose audiences never allowed him to act a play through to the

163. Idem, p. 44.

164. Idem, p. 24.

165. Idem, p. 413.

end. He decided to profit by this and only learned the first acts. The plan worked fine for a time, the audience well content to draw it to a close by the end of the first act. But one night luck changed. He was playing in a town where the audience not only failed to hiss but applauded most heartily. He knew no more than the first act and was forced, therefore, to announce that he could not give the second act before the following day. This announcement of course brought the customary hissing.[166]

The blackness of the picture is not entirely unrelieved. Larra found words of commendation for the works of men like Martínez de la Rosa,[167] Antonio García Gutiérrez,[168] Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch,[169] Bretón de los Herreros,[170] and Manuel Eduardo Gorostiza.[171] He not infrequently praised the actors and actresses. Such names as Cárlos Latorre, Julián Romea, Concepción Rodríguez and Matilde Díez are mentioned with words of com-

166. Idem, p. 368.

167. Idem, pp. 337-341 (La Conjuración de Venecia)

168. Idem, pp. 492-495 (El Trovador)

169. Idem, pp. 559-562 (Los Amantes De Teruel)

170. Idem, pp. 309-311 (Un Tercero en Discordia)

171. Idem, pp. 275-278 (Contigo Pan y Cebolla)

mendation. And of Concepción Rodríguez he has said: "No one could equal her in good diction."[172] He saw the first performances of the two actors, Julián Romea and Matilde Díez, the former a pupil of Latorre's and the latter a follower of Concepción Rodríguez. Latorre, who was professor of the School of Declamation for a few years, is praised oftener, and with reason, for others than Larra ranked him as perhaps the first actor of the day.[174]

Literature.

Each century has its particular mode of expression. Literature, like all other things, changes with time and if a country does not realize this, its literature becomes colorless and stagnant and fails to keep pace with the progress of the nation in other fields. First, religious tyranny and later, political intrigues kept Spain from progressing. Then at a time when literary production was at a point of crisis foreign influence came in and for over a hundred years the country was literally chained to a French fanaticism. With the accession of Fernando VII conditions might have become better but his autocrasy helped to throw literature and the fine arts

172. Idem, p. 503.

173. See Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., pp. 136-138.

174. Idem, p. 136; also Mesonero Romanos: op.cit., p.69 (vol.2); also Obras, pp. 494; 498; 561; 45.

into the darkest period of the nation's history, i.e., that in which Larra wrote.[175]

Literature is said to be the expression of the progress of a nation and it is necessary that it follow along the lines that progress has taken. But for the writers of Spain to try to use the same language, the same mode of expression in the 19th century as in the seventeenth was sheer folly. It would be like asking Cervantes to write an article on the Stock Exchange or Direct Means of Election in the language of the"Quijote." Tradition should not be cast aside but neither should one be a slave to it. The language should be flexible and the result a literature that represented the sum total of the nation's progress. But Spain had forgotten her traditions in the nineteenth century. Foreign sources were used almost entirely and these chiefly French. Could one expect a true national literature under such circumstances?

There were no histories, no national poets, no literature worthy of the country to which they belonged. If the sonnets and "Odes of Circumstance" that flooded the country were an expression of its

175. Obras, pp. 473-474.

intellectual progress, then literature was in a sorry state indeed and well might the writers of the Siglo de Oro have turned in their graves in horror and protest.[176]

Any history is bound to be subjectively colored. In the days of old one needed the lamp of Diogenes to find a man and his dates. In the Nineteenth century one needed all the lamps of good taste and sane judgment to untangle history from fiction and to verify anything.[177] It might have been compared to an immense moon placed in a room filled with masqueraders; one saw, but neither clearly nor accurately.[178]

Among the biographical sketches and memoirs of the period stood a work worthy of mention, namely Las Memorias Originales of Godoy,[179] which presented a more kindly picture of the much despised ruler than he usually got.[180] Another work along this line was

176. Idem, pp. 476-477.

177. Idem, pp. 527-528.

178. Idem, p. 528.

179. Manuel Godoy(1772-1857) was minister under Charles the Fourth and practically dictated this monarch's policies. After his fall he wrote the "Memoirs" which appeared in five volumes in Madrid 1836-38, six volumes in Paris 1839-41 and six volumes in Madrid 1842.

180. Obras, p. 532.

Vidas de Españoles Célebres by Don Manuel José Quintana,[181] a well known poet and scholar of the day. The work, whose completion was retarded, due to the stress of the times, was a worthy piece of work which attempted neither to praise nor blame, but to present a faithful picture of some of the country's literary men of past decades.[182]

Poetry was in a very feeble state. No one poet was to blame, perhaps, but the gradual decline of the field in general. But with everything else in a state of retardation why should one expect poetry to grow fat and flourish?

In 1835 a volume of verse appeared in Madrid under the name, Don Juan Bautista Alonso. It was composed of romances, sonnets, letrillas, songs and odes. The volume was of little merit and has obtained more importance through Larra's praise of it than by any intrinsic merit of its own. Alonso was a bucolic poet after the manner of his predecessor, Meléndez. He showed poetic imagination in more than one composition and, according to Larra, La Vida Feliz is the best that

181. Madrid 1807-1833, three volumes.

182. Obras, pp. 328-330.

has been written in Castilian and in any language.[183] The Ode in memory of the birthday of Dolores Armijo also ranked very high with Larra. One can understand this praise, however, when one takes into consideration that this was the woman for love of whom he took his own life.[184]

Some of the writers of the day affected purisms and a lofty style. They also used epigrams and latinisms which they considered a sign of the deepest learning. Pedantry has always been the precursor of the decadence of letters. But those in Spain did not have to worry about this for it was impossible for a thing which was already prostrate to fall further.[185] Don Timoteo was a literary man who had to live up to the dignity of his profession. He was disdainful to all, received every one seated, never returned calls, dressed queerly and occasionally condescended to write a sonnet or an "Ode of Circumstance". Larra may have had Don Juan Nicasio Gallego in mind when describing Don Timoteo.[186]

183. Obras, p. 396.

184. See Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., pp. 124-127.

185. Obras, p. 25.

186. See Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., p. 124. Gallego (1777-1853) was a Spanish poet, known chiefly for his patriotic odes.

The picaresque novels were one of the forerunners of the cuadros de costumbres. Two noteworthy examples were La Celestina and Gil Blas.[187] Following these came letters, journeys, travelogues and memoirs. In England Addison and Steele wrote about man in his relationship to others in the famous journal "The Spectator". A deluge of panoramic literature invaded Spain in the nineteenth century and was the immediate precursor of the articles on manners. Everyone lived too fast to write novels, and if they had been written no one would have taken the time to read them. It was the day of the periodical and the newspaper. Some dozen or more reviews came into being during the years in which Larra did his writing but due to the rigorousness of the censorship and the precarious times this number fluctuated from day to day.[188] Only La Gaceta seemed to flourish and appear in every household, but it was a governmental journal so of course need not fear the censorship.[189]

187. Obras, p. 512. Larra evidently did not know who wrote Gil Blas.

188. Le Gentil, Georges: Les Revues Littéraires de l'Espagne, Paris 1909.

189. Obras, pp. 405-406.

Mesonero Romanos in his Panorama Matritense was one of the first writers in the journalistic era who wrote cuadros de costumbres. He had a difficulty, however, which was this: The country was in a period of transition and he was in the situation of the painter that tried to catch the changing expressions of a child; he was a hunter trying to shoot a bird on the wing. And who knows? Maybe this was the best kind of a hunter.[190] Mesonero was a happy imitator of Jouy and though less erudite he was more of a thinker and less superficial. His work, however, often lacked force and vigor due, no doubt to his great desire to please and to offend no one.[191]

The obstacles which the writer of social manners encountered were not few. If he wrote a good article the public insisted that it was a translation. If he tried not to offend anyone he was colorless and without humor. If he made them laugh he was a clown and if he made telling thrusts, a fierce man. If he portrayed a character, having no particular person in mind, the public cried: "What a knave! How exactly he has portrayed Don Fulano."[192] Mesonero avoided most of these difficulties by his blandness. He

190. Idem, pp. 386-387.

191. Idem, p. 517.

192. See Nombela: op. cit., p. 170.

was a satirist but of the mildest kind.

The abuses suffered by the writers of the day at the hands of the publishers is hardly comprehensible to those living in the twentieth century. Everyone nowadays thinks he is master of his own property; not so, then. The writers were like the monkey, born to amuse gratuitously. Their writings belonged to anyone who could lay hands on them. The Lord created the poet for the bookseller much as he did the mice for the cat and evidently the publishers followed a natural instinct when they published another's works, either without reimbursing him at all, or else paying a few _reales_ for the "exclusive" rights of publication. In the latter case this often meant a change of title as well as authorship.[193]

In Spain the authors wrote for others than themselves; it was dangerous for a man to say what he thought, which is equivalent to saying man ought not to know what he knows and that legs ought not to be used for walking, in Spain, then, one wrote for another, i.e., the censor.[194] Larra was not one of these writers. He always told the truth and that was what the censorship said it wanted. But did it? It would seem as if the question were debatable.

193. _Obras_, p. 23.

194. _Idem_, p. 405.

What it wanted was general praise, praise without limit or restrictions. And here we have the explanation for Fígaro's great popularity.[195]

Municipal Affairs.

An attitude of indifference toward all public utilities and interests was prevalent in Madrid. Everything was cuasi(almost) even to the building of hospitals or the erection of public buildings.[196]

The mail service was poor at best and if one really wanted to see that a letter was delivered it was better to deliver it personally or else by a trusted messenger. Otherwise it might be sent to France or even America.[197]

In the matter of public debts the country was on a par with the most advanced nations if one considered that it was a sign of ripeness for the fruit to fall. It was más que madura - pasada.[198] Spain was a rich nation if one accepted the philosophical statement that the one that has the most money is not necessarily the richest

195. Idem, p. 406.

196. Idem, pp. 452-454.

197. Idem, p. 350.

198. Ibidem.

but the one who has the fewest wants. According to this rule, what nation was richer than Spain? There no one wanted more than he had; everyone was content with little. In fact, hardly anything was lacking; nothing but money.[199]

Most of the roads could hardly be called roads; rather paths, unless the "road to heaven" was an exception. Along this all were travelling like good Christians with much patience.[200]

Sanitary conditions were very poor in Madrid and epidemics of cholera, etc. were common. Cholera also worked its ravages in some of the provinces much as the rules of the censorship,[201] and killed as many as the civil war pardoned.[202] The cemeteries were full of remedies and sure cures for it.[203]

Madrid had a police force as well as any other country. The Inquisition in past decades had been nothing more nor less than a body of religious police. There were in the nineteenth century two types: the "political police"

199. Idem, p. 357.

200. Ibidem.

201. Idem, p. 358.

202. Idem, p. 381.

203. Idem, pp. 349-350.

whose chief task was the protection of the central government and the urban militia who purported to enforce city laws and order. The political police were the most active, as would be natural in times of revolution, and many personal slights and grievances were avenged through them. The slightest misstep or bantering phrase when reported to the police might be construed to mean a serious offense against the government. Eight million reales had been spent in order that all conversations might be regulated, all outloud thinking restrained.[204] One of the chief duties of the city militia was the issuance of passports. Madrid might not have good roads, canals or vehicles of conveyance but it did have passports. Even in the matter of passports one had to be long-suffering and patient for the officials seemed to delight in insulting everyone, certain that they would not be molested because in them was vested the power to arrest, or rather, molest.[205]

One needed no other qualification to be a policeman than that of being deaf. And it was so easy to be deaf. Of course to pretend to be deaf was another thing, but it served just as well.[206] The urban militia functioned occasionally — on feast days in the afternoon and at the

204. Idem, p. 392.

205. Idem, p. 364.

206. Ibidem.

theater at night — but for the most part it never let itself become encumbered with any set duties.[207]

The unsanitary conditions of the prisons and the harsh treatment of the prisoners were facts known by few but the perpetrators of crime. The government either did not know or else feigned ignorance of these conditions. If one entered a prison innocent or for a slight fault he would never come out that way. If it had been the same in Spain as the United States — "that a man who went into a house of correction for a slight fault came out with a capital that the establishment had reserved for him from the savings accruing from his work"[208] there would have been little cause for complaint, for a prison there did not mean a free boarding house where one could live in comparative comfort.

The jails in Madrid where the accused were kept awaiting trial were foul places. And not only did the inmates suffer bodily discomforts but mental as well. They were often tortured or coerced into confessing to a crime of which they might or might not be guilty.[209]

Those who were convicted, the majority of whom had confessed before trial, entered the State prisons where

207. Idem, p. 392.

208. Idem, pp. 321-322.

209. Idem, pp. 504-505.

they ceased to live. They existed; yes, but they did not live. Prison pastimes were not numerous but the barateros[210] managed to make the most of the meager opportunities. They followed the rule of "Might makes right" and obtained by fair means or foul what others had won at gambling, at which game probably even the gamblers had cheated. Thus the cheaters cheated the cheaters and from this custom arose many riots and disorders.[211]

Duelling was prohibited by law and to all outward appearances the law was enforced. But it was a crime only among thieves and paupers. The rich and noble had to settle their affairs in the old manner — by duelling — but if a couple of criminals or people of the lower classes got into an argument over their rights to the barato, for instance, and one killed the other, society immediately stepped in and demanded justice.[212]

Capital punishment was one of the commonest penalties inflicted upon those who happened to violate any

210. The barato was the sum of money that the winners in a game gave to whom they might wish. The baratero was the one who obtained the barato, either voluntarily or by force.

211. Obras, p. 505.

212. Idem, pp. 505-506.

of the country's laws. This usually took the form of hanging, which method was old and tried and hence good. The execution was always a public affair. On the day of the hanging the streets were crowded and the balconies overflowing with expectant onlookers. One might have thought they were awaiting the arrival of the king or that the city was celebrating some great occasion.

The condemned usually met his last hour calmly. For the ignorant and unenlightened to whom life had meant nothing it was no more than one more mechanical process. For the religious soul it was but a test of his faith in the hereafter. For the partly educated man it meant some fears and misgivings for he knew just enough to want to live and had done just enough evil to fear death. For the atheist or those who had fitted their religion to their conduct, death meant nothing and they approached the gallows with indifference. Political offenders who died for an opinion often made a most edifying end.[213]

But whether guilty or not, a man once convicted was hung and there were few reprisals. If the criminal really had done wrong by killing some one, society was going to do good by killing him. Thus it hoped to remedy one evil by committing two.[214]

213. Idem, p. 408.

214. Idem, p. 409.

Empleomanía.

The curse of public office-seeking has never been restricted to any one country but its roots were perhaps as deeply imbedded in the Madrid of Larra's day as they have ever been in any place before or since. Along with this made rush for political offices followed all the petty thieveries, briberies and false promises which are the inevitable accompaniment of office-seeking on such a competitive basis. And little wonder every one wanted a governmental position. The employees led such a peaceful life. Their salary ran on forever, like a river, whether they were ill or well. One went to the office in the morning — around nine or ten —, read La Gaceta, smoked innumerable cigarettes or cigars, went to lunch, smoked some more, occasionally had a portentious conference with some one they had kept waiting for a few days, weeks or months in the anteroom, and the days work was done. Business was never carried on after working hours. Of course one lost a job occasionally but there was always another.

Besides his regular salary the government employee had opportunities to make money on the side. It was not really purloined for a quien Dios se la dió, San Pedro se la bendiga.[215] If he had any qualms of conscience about the legitimacy of the means by which it was obtained he

215. Idem, p. 49.

quieted them by giving alms to the poor, thus cleansing his hands of any uncleanliness by giving to the Lord what he had taken away from others; that is if one called it robbery to take advantage of those innocent fools who let themselves be the dupes of others.[216]

It might be said in passing that this "pin money" was not actually obtained by going out in the street and knocking people down. No, indeed; the wise employee used the subtler means of big business at which the law winked with a clear conscience.[217]

The qualifications for a government employee, like those for a policeman, were very few. In fact a convenient deafness and a superb indifference to all that went on about him sufficed.[218]

Means of Transportation.

Among the things which measure a nation's progress are its means of communication with other nations as well as widely separated points within its own boundaries. Means of travel in Larra's day were like everything else - retarded.[219]

216. Ibidem.

217. Idem, p. 50; pp. 7-8.

218. Idem, p. 50.

219. Idem, p. 414.

The stage coach was the chief vehicle of travel for long distances. To the preceding generation a journey in it was an undertaking of no little moment. One had to go from inn to inn, traversing all Madrid trying to find one. The average speed of the coaches was six or seven leagues a day and bad weather lessened this. A journey of thirty leagues was an undertaking, a trip to Paris the event of a life time. A returned traveller was the object of great curiosity. But times had changed since the days of Larra's fathers. Two numerous emigrations had shown all the world the road from Paris to London. One who had not been to Paris was an object of wonder and even ridicule.[220]

The post houses from which the stage coaches made their departure were always places of much animation. At the entrance to them a large sign announced that only travellers, their servants, employees and those who came to take leave of or meet travellers might enter; that is to say, everyone. Posted on the walls were schedules of prices, itineraries, guide books, etc. But unwise was the traveller who consulted them first and the information desk later. Just because the catalogue included a certain stage line this was no sign that it existed. Just because the price-list quoted rates was no sign that such rates held. In other words, the one who wished to travel bought

220. Idem, p. 415.

his ticket first and asked questions afterward. Of course it might happen that the clerk would refuse to give any information but in this case one could return later, or not, as he pleased.[221]

One could easily distinguish passengers from friends and relatives. The latter were always excited and asked every few minutes when the coach would arrive or when it would leave. The male passengers usually wore a cape or long cloak, even in warm weather. The women invariably carried huge reticules which contained their handkerchiefs, fan, money, passport, drinking cup, keys, and heaven knows what else.[222]

Those who rode in the coach usually started out strangers but two or three days with their respective nights usually made friends, or enemies of all. A love affair could be well advanced in a journey of several days and a lawyer got much practice for the future during the long hours he spent sleeping.[223]

For travel in and about Madrid there were various types of coaches which pretended to provide a public service by transporting people to and from their

221. Idem, p. 416.

222. Ibidem.

223. Ibidem.

destinations. Most of them were dilapidated affairs ready to fall to pieces at a moment's notice. Both horse and driver were usually so unkempt and covered with dust and dirt that one might think they were twins and furthermore that they were going to die at the same time, and this soon. The body of the carriage usually swayed like a teeter-totter and the heavier fare got the most bumps. Some coaches were so wobbly and dilapidated that their passengers were reminded of the trip of Don Quijote and Sancho on the flying horse; much notion but little progress.[224]

Home Life.

It is traditional that the home is the nucleus about which the family life revolves. It is one of the smallest social groups but none the less important. In Madrid, as elsewhere, there were many types of families but these readily fall into three main groups: the upper class family; the middle class family and the lower class family. Since the middle class was the more numerous and hence more indicative of the general culture it got closer observation.[225]

The typical middle class Madrileño was big-hearted, but uncouth, having no sense of refinement nor

224. Idem, p. 58.

225. See Nombela: op. cit., p. 171.

good taste. He believed blindly that everything Spanish was perfect, that there were no wines like the Spanish wines (which was true), that there was no education like that in Spain (which was not true). He was biased, self-satisfied, without desire to better himself because he thought he was good enough. It would do no good to tell him that one should always show a certain refinement and delicacy in his relationships with others, that one should only say what pleased and keep to himself anything that would offend. Gentility to him was mere hypocrisy. To every good thing he gave a bad name. The language of good breeding was Greek. He believed that it consisted merely in a "May God keep you" when you entered his home, and a "With your permission" every time you left and a solicitous asking about the health of your family at regular intervals.[226]

The lack of refinement and good breeding was conspicuous to all but the family itself. It took an outsider, either one belonging to the upper stratum or a foreigner properly to appreciate their poor manners. This middle class was very hospitable and frequently invited their friends to dine. The dinners were a nightmare to anyone who was used to better. The host would consider it an act of hospitality to make you take off your dinner

226. Obras, p. 35.

coat and put on an old dirty one belonging to him that you might not soil your own. He would insist that you act just as if you were in your own home, no formality, no etiquette, which was the same as no manners. If the meal were poorly cooked, as was often the case, somebody had to be blamed and the most natural culprit was the mistress of the house. She in turn could scold the servants.[227]

There was usually a fowl to be carved and nothing gave the host more pleasure than to be able to carve a bird successfully amidst the admiration and applause of the guests.[228]

Asking grace and impromptu speeches were common indignities imposed upon the guest of honor. In this he was considered to be especially favored by the host who could not see that making a guest feel at home was not exhibiting him much as one might some rare or prized possession.[229]

The home life of the lower classes was a poor thing at best. In fact there was no time for real living. One ate when there was food, slept when there was a bed

227. Idem, pp. 36-38.

228. Benavente, Jacinto: De Sobremesa, Madrid 1910, vol.4, pp. 62-65.

229. Obras, p. 38.

or a pile of rags to sleep on, and drank whenever pay day came around. There were no amusements to be found at home. There was no time nor place for them. The only amusement that broke the monotony was the bullfights which took place every Monday.[230] There were, however, several occupations among the poorer classes which increased their monetary gains and did much to lessen the uneventfulness of their lives. The cobbler and the ragdealer, if they were sharp and kept their wits about them, might almost make enough money on the side to raise themselves to the proud category of middle class citizens. Many a love note found its way to the ragdealer's baskets. And if perchance the note breathed of scandal its lowly finder might easily turn his find into money. The cobbler who stationed himself in the doorway of apartment houses was luckier even than the ragdealer. He saw everything. Not an action of the occupants of the apartment escaped his vigilant eye. If one had sons and daughters, sisters, a wife, or creditors, he ran a risk if he took up his abode in a house that had a cobbler in its threshold. It didn't do any good to pay him hush money for the other interested party could do likewise. The cobbler had no scruples and grew rich at the expense of his helpless victims. He was aided in his work

230. Idem, pp. 343-344; also Larra, Mariano José de: Artículos de Costumbres, Clásicos Castellanos, vol.45, Madrid 1923, pp. 34-35.

by his wife who did various odd jobs such as cleaning, mending, etc. for the tenants and thus found out the few details her husband could not procure by merely watching the coming and going of the occupants.[231]

The upper class family of Madrid was an entity in itself and the last word in social prestige and etiquette. The relationship of the husband and wife was a rather flexible one, however, and it often suited the convenience of both parties to seek their pleasure in the company of other husbands or wives or sons and daughters, as the case might be. No infrequently this outside pleasure brought its tragedy. An incident comes to mind. A beautiful coquette, of good family, married a young man who also ranked high in the social scale. Every one called it a brilliant match. Six months after the marriage the wife grew annoyed at her husband's preoccupiedness. He loved her no doubt but was too busy to humor her whims. She demanded constant attention and hence had to seek it elsewhere. One man in particular paid constant homage to her. At first it was merely a game but the game became serious and her husband finally discovered her deception. His honor had to be saved so a duel was arranged. He was

231. Obras, pp. 442-443.

killed but, Gracias a Dios, his wife and honor were saved. For what? Some one asked. Why the other man, of course.[232]

A young society matron, if beautiful, was in some respects most unfortunate for even if constant to her husband and family she rarely was given credit for it. Her sisters were jealous of her charms. Another matron, less beautiful, and not particularly charming might have several love affairs and yet pass for the most virtuous woman in Madrid.[233]

One of the favorite pastimes of the Madrileñó elite was gossiping. It was a dull afternoon that did not bring its accompanying scandal. It took little or nothing to start it. If one spoke to a pretty girl he was trying to seduce her; if he spoke to an ugly one he was after her money. One social call was sufficient grounds to start murmurs of illicit relations.[234]

The homes of those of the wealthier classes were alike in several respects. They were all so full of brick-abrac and rubbish that each room reminded one of a trunk, with everything packed in so tightly that in case of fire the whole room could be moved without breaking anything.[235]

232. Idem, pp. 420-421.

233. Idem, p. 384.

234. Ibidem.

235. Idem, p. 291.

Another appurtenance which every house contained, or at least every one in which there was a young lady, was an "album". This was a large book, luxuriously bound, with its pages in the beginning blank. It was like a fan, a parasol; for the sole use of women. A young lady without an album would be like a body without a soul, a river without water.

It is true the pages were blank at first but they did not remain so long, especially if the owner were a popular young girl with many admiring suitors. If the suitor were a poet, he wrote a poem to his lady love on one of the album's smooth white pages; if an artist he drew a sketch of her; if a musician he transcribed a musical score and dedicated it to her. In the true sense of the word the album was a repertory of vanity and the verses from admiring pens "various pools where a single Narcissus looked and was reflected."[236]

An album might have had some value, especially if it happened to contain a sketch of Goya's, a verse of Chateaubriand's or of Lord Byron's or the signature of Napolean. But most of them were merely a sort of cemetery in which many foolish things laid buried.[237]

236. Idem, p. 423.

237. Idem, pp. 423-424.

Education.

The chief thing noted about the education of the young in Madrid was the lack of it. There were practically no schools for the poor and the children of the more well-to-do either had tutors or else attended some private school. A great many were sent to France or England.

The education of the boy of the eighteenth century was as much too narrow as the education of the nineteenth century was too broad. In the former period every book was censored before the child was allowed to read it. The training was classical and devoutly religious. The child led a life almost as secluded as that of a monk in a monastery and he was utterly unable to cope with life when it came time for him to take on its responsibilities. In the nineteenth century the young boy read anything. Religion was neither fashionable nor necessary. Respect for parents was out of date. He grew up in an atmosphere of superficiality and pretensions. He was given many liberties and took more. He was early urged to express himself and at fifteen he thought he knew everything. In matters of love he was a past master. It was beneath his dignity to turn his hand to work. The education of the girl consisted mainly in training for a social career. She must play the piano, sing a little, and know how to grace a drawing room. She was not taught how to keep house and spent her spare moments in reading sentimental

novels. Was it any wonder that marriage proved so often to be a failure when the husband did not know how to make a living and the wife did not know how to care for a home? The wife had never read in her sentimental novels where the lovers thought of eating or had the husband ever heard anyone mention supporting a wife. So, to them, marriage was no more than one long,happy dream of love and kisses.[238]

In Conclusion.

To present a partial picture of Madrid, its manners, customs and vices, as Larra saw it, has been the purpose of this chapter. Incidentally other parts of Spain and even France and England have been brought into the discussion whenever they had a bearing on the subject. It has not been possible nor would it have been expedient to reproduce every detail. Various descriptions of places, their inhabitants, their dwelling houses, their industries have been omitted.[239] Observance of feast days and religious ceremonies, which formed the incidental background for other types of articles than fitted into the discussion have not been included.[240] The bronce herido which announced the Día de Difuntos of 1836 in

238. Idem, pp. 31-34.

239. Idem, pp.426-431; pp. 445-448; pp. 449-451.

240. Idem, pp. 536-539; pp. 548-553; pp.887-888.

Madrid was merely tolling the death of the whole city in the disillusioned and tortured mind of Larra.[241] La Noche Buena was nothing more to him than a sad reminder of the day on which he was born.[242] Lent was merely a season when all dancing (except the Swiss dances) became disagreeable to the eyes of God; a period of forty days during which the hypocrisy of the Madrileños was less visible. There was a certain time for everything.[243] Fashions — except in a general way — in an article entitled Modas[244] have also been omitted due to their political dress. Larra evidently felt them not to be very important. And why should he not? They had not been in the past because there were no collections of period styles in Spain and to him, as others no doubt, came the question as to whether his ancestors had really worn clothes.[245]

The articles on the Batuecans have not been considered separately but a number of their ideas have

241. Idem, p. 537.

242. Idem, p. 548.

243. Idem, p. 887.

244. Idem, pp. 352-353.

245. Idem, pp. 65-66.

been incorporated in the discussion of the Madrileño who of course is nothing more nor less than a Batuecan shorn of his thin disguise.

In all it has been the writer's purpose to present an objective discussion of Larra's articles on manners. Such a method makes a less complete picture and no doubt a less exact one than Larra gives but it does make it possible to give in a general way at least a pen picture of the Capitol of Spain in one of the darkest periods of its existence.

CHAPTER III.

A LITERARY APPRECIATION.

French Influence.

In Beaumarchais' (1732-1799) Barbier de Séville one sees the original of Larra's best known and most lasting pseudonym. Just why he chose Fígaro he explains himself in his first article to appear in La Revista Española.[246] He was neither a barber nor from Seville, but it amounted to the same thing, for he was a charlatan, a plotter and very curious.[247] And it is perhaps the most fitting pseudonym for two reasons: first, because Beaumarchais' character exemplifies his own aspirations, viz, to become a satirist,[248] and second, because he is a sort of stepchild of France in regard to early training, education and general culture.

If a pseudonym were the only debt he owed to France, the matter might very well be dropped, but

246. Obras, p. 259. Mi Nombre y Mis Propósitos.

247. Ibidem.

248. McGuire: op.cit., pp.96-97.

even an extreme Figarista has to acknowledge the influence of French authors, French works and French customs. Larra's early youth was spent in Bordeaux[249] and his education was more French than Spanish. Later, when he grew to manhood, he spent nearly a year in France[250] where he came into contact with such men as Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas. At this time he wrote the text for a French work, which has been previously cited.[251]

Cejador[252] calls the German, Grimm and the Frenchman, Jean Paul Courrier, Larra's spiritual fathers, Jouy his model as a costumbrista, Sebastián Miñano his anticlerical prototype but most influential of all was Beaumarchais.

There have been many arguments as to just how much Larra imitated Jouy in the field of the article on manners. Azorín says he read several volumes of Jouy and that he is reminded more of Mesonero than Larra. His (Larra's) true spiritual influence is to be found in Beaumarchais.[253] Larra must have read him much. We

249. See above, Chapter I, pp.3-4.

250. Idem, p. 16.

251. Ibidem.

252. Op.cit., p. 115.

253. Azorín: op.cit., p. 274.

know that Larra's library contained three volumes of Fígaro.[254] Carmen de Burgos does not consider Jouy so much of an influence as Courrier. She also agrees with Azorín with regard to Larra's knowledge of Beaumarchais and his works.[255] Cánovas del Castillo[256] goes so far in his statement of sources as to say that Larra has not only imitated but taken entire subjects and articles from Jouy and Courrier, usually without even so much as giving credit.

While most of the articles appearing in El Pobrecito Hablador are original, it is to be noted that Larra borrowed, either directly or in part, from Jouy and Courrier. But Chaves waves the matter of French influence aside with the remark: "What does it matter if he did have a French original for ¿Quién es el público? Plagiarism or imitation is not a serious offense in one of Larra's talent and if he did take Courrier and Jouy as models it was but to produce something entirely original, adapting it to Spanish manners and more than once improving upon his model!"[257]

254. Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., p. 160.

255. Idem, p. 161.

256. Op.cit., pp. 140-141.

257. Chaves: op.cit., p. 40.

Mr. W.S. Hendrix[258] has made the most authoritative study of Larra's indebtedness to Jouy that I know of and some of his findings are worthy of mention. He as others has wished to explain and modify in part, the statement of men like Cánovas del Castillo who have said that Larra does not give credit where credit is due.

It has already been noted that borrowings and translations were very common in Larra's day[259] and it was not considered a heinous offense. In Larra's Dos Palabras, which itself is imitated from Jouy's preface to L'Hermite,[260] we read in part: ..."our object being to amuse by whatever means possible and to use anything that we deem satisfactory or sufficient that occurs to our poor imagination, we declare frankly that we will obtain our material where we can, publishing it entire or abridged, translated, arranged or revised, citing the source or boldly appropriating it to ourselves, because as poor prattlers we speak our own thoughts as well as others, certain that that which is important to the public of all that goes in print is not the name of the author but the quality of the writing, and that it is better to amuse with other's ideas than bore with one's own...We

258. Hendrix, W.S.: Notes on Jouy's Influence on Larra, Romanic Review, vol.11, no.1, Jan.-March 1920.

259. See above, Chapter II, pp.46-47.

260. Hendrix: op.cit., p. 40.

shall bring our poor genius and exchange it for that of another, and with distinct additions we shall adopt it, as many others do, without mentioning the fact; in such a way that there will result articles that resemble another's cloak with new lapels... Who can deny that such articles belong to us after we have stolen them? They will be ours by right of conquest. They will be, nevertheless, entirely ours."[261]

Larra occasionally admits his borrowings or plaigarizing but seldom gives the sources. In La Revista del Año 1834, he clearly states that he has plagiarized from Jouy.[262] The latter's Revue de l'an 1812 is the source although Jouy's is a literary review while Larra's is a political one.[263] Larra calls ¿Quién es el público? an artículo robado[264] but he does not mention the source. In the article, El Album, he mentions that a certain French author wrote an article on albums some years previous to his but he does not say who.[265] It is no doubt imitated from two articles of Jouy's, Des Album and Recherches sur

261. Obras, p. 2.

262. Idem, p. 269.

263. Hendrix: op.cit., p. 42.

264. Obras, p. 3.

265. Idem, p. 424.

l'album.[266]

There are a number of articles that Mr. Hendrix cites which are imitations of Jouy to a greater or lesser degree, although Larra himself does not mention the fact. El Día de Difuntos de 1836 was partly inspired by Jouy's Les Sépultures[267] but there is no satire in the latter article and it is certain that no one can read Larra's article without feeling his personality permeating it. Ya Soy Redactor may have been suggested by Le Bureau d'un Journal of Jouy, although here again the personal note leads one to believe that the article is original.[268] There are some similarities between Jouy's Le Carnaval et le Bal del'opéra and Larra's El Mundo Todo es Máscaras, e.g. the clandestine meetings at the ball, the Frenchman's seeing the people asleep as compared with the Spaniard's dream of them, etc.[269] Quelques Portraits suggested Larra's Varios Caracteres although the characters are different.[270] La Diligencia imitates Jouy's La Cour des Messageries, although in the introductory paragraphs, in which Larra comments on conditions in Spain, he is entirely original.[271]

266. Hendrix: op. cit., p. 39.

267. Ibidem.

268. Idem, p. 40.

269. Idem, pp. 40-41.

270. Idem, p. 41.

271. Ibidem.

While Los Barateros is no doubt original the subject of prisons may have been suggested from Jouy's La Prision pour dettes.[272] One is more inclined to believe, however, that the public hanging of a baratero in Madrid was the incident that inspired Larra's article.[273] La Maison de Prêt inspired Empeños y Desempeños. In both articles the visitor in a pawnshop is disillusioned as to the need of those who pawn things.[274] Jouy's Une Première Représentation d'aujourd'hui suggested Larra's Una Primera Representación.[275] Larra's Vida de Madrid and Jouy's La Journée d'un jeune homme have the same general idea although the introductions are different.[276] Jouy's Une exécution en Grève or Espronceda's poem with the same title may have suggested Larra's Un Reo de Muerte.[277] In Larra's article, Muerte del Pobrecito Hablador he has inculcated ideas from Jouy's two articles La Mort de l'hermite and Le Testament de l'hermite. In each case the

272. Ibidem.

273. Obras, p. 504. (See note taken from Diario de Madrid)

274. Hendrix: op. cit., pp. 42-43.

275. Idem, p. 43.

276. Ibidem.

277. Ibidem.

death is announced by letter.[278]

Georges Le Gentil,[279] speaking of Larra's indebtedness to Etienne Jouy thinks that there is a resemblance between Les Restaurateurs and La Fonda Nueva and between La Sociedad and Moeurs des Salons. Mr. Hendrix does not agree with him, however, on this point.[280] In several articles both Jouy and Larra complain of the difficulty of writing so frequently to amuse the public; for instance, Larra in Empeños y Desempeños and Jouy in L'hermite au Café de Chatres.[281]

Besides Larra's imitations and suggestions from Jouy, one notes other borrowings. In a footnote to the article De 1830 a 1836 Larra clearly states that Charles Didier is the author and he does not mention his corrections or additions as having anything to do with the authorship.[282]

Besides Jouy, Le Sage,[283] Boileau,[284] Voltaire,[285]

278. Idem, p. 44.

279. Le Poète Manuel Bretón de Los Herreros..., Paris 1909, pp. 240-243 (cited by Hendrix)

280. Ubi Supra, p. 43.

281. Hendrix,: ubi supra, p. 44.

282. Obras, p. 567 (cited by Miss McGuire).

283. Hendrix: ubi supra, p. 40.

284. Idem, p. 30.

285. Idem, p. 45; also Carmen de Burgos: op.cit., p.161.

Courrier,[286] Lammenais[287] and others of French birth have been the inspiration and source for some of Larra's articles. With so many sources, the doubt may arise as to just what place should be assigned to him in Spanish letters. Perhaps Chaves, as previously quoted, has summed the matter up as well as anyone. It is not how much he has borrowed but what he has done with what he borrowed. In no case has he been a servile imitator and if one is to follow the opinion of more recent years, he has always improved upon the original, many times so changing it that the work is almost his own.

Universality.

The purpose of the costumbrista is to portray the life and manners of some particular country and its people. In this respect one usually thinks of him as a nationalist because he is writing about his country and his people and his appeal is presumably to them. Miñano was a costumbrista; so was Estébanez Calderón; likewise Mesonero Romanos. And it is true that their articles on Spain and Spanish life are more or less faithful pictures of particular phases of its customs and manners.

286. Cánovas del Castillo: op.cit., p. 141.

287. Obras, pp. 591-629.

If the only think the costumbrista did was to present a faithful picture of his country at some particular period, however laudable a work this might be, his articles would not have much of a universal appeal. Customs change, ways of living are not the same and with the passage of time the writings of the costumbrista lose much of their original appeal. How many read the articles of the three above mentioned costumbristas today? Miñano is read hardly at all, Estébanez not much more, and even Mesonero Romanos' popularity has suffered with the years. But Larra's articles, unlike those of his contemporaries, have been more read with the passage of time than all their articles put together. And why is this so? Larra, as the others, gives us a picture of Spain in the early nineteenth century and there is no doubt that his articles had and have a great nationalistic appeal. But the quality that his work has that one does not note in any of the others, except to a much lesser degree, is that of universality. It is true that his articles were read with avidity by the Madrileño public at the time of their appearance but how many of their readers thought that they would endure more than anything else written at that period? Nearly one hundred years have passed since Larra died and it

has remained to those living in this century to compute the inestimable value of his articles. The Spaniards of today proudly claim him as one of their great writers. They are able now, because of course the shoe of his satirical thrusts does not fit so well, to appreciate his real worth. One of the first remarks that a Spaniard is likely to make to a foreigner who is visiting in his country is: "You've heard of the author of Vuelva Usted Mañana, haven't you?

One does not usually think of journalistic writings as having any more than an immediate appeal. Current events are chiefly interesting only to those who are living them. But Larra was not a journalist in this sense. Perhaps his political articles have less of a universal appeal because they do refer to current events but such is not the case either with his literary criticisms or his articles on manners.

It seems that the propitiousness of the times have something to do with an author's medium of expression. Larra lived in a journalistic age. Even if novels and longer works had been written it is doubtful whether they would have been read. In the words of Larra: "En el día es preciso hablar y correr a un tiempo."[288] And because

288. Obras, p. 386.

Larra happened to live at a time when the little that was written was chiefly in the form of short articles, it is not surprising that he took it as his mode of expression, more perhaps that he might have a reading public than because he thought it the highest form of literary expression. Today journalism is a profession but it is not the chief medium of literary thought; then it was. So it is, that Larra's articles represent the highest form of literary expression of the day. And it is not strange that his articles, like any other masterpieces, should have a universal appeal. Piñeyro calls his articles on manners "little masterpieces which produce with as much excellence, keen observation and bitter frankness as Cervantes the public and private life of Spain in that critical period of her history."[289]

Society is constantly changing, at least in outer appearances, but ever since the beginning of time, man has been endowed with more or less the same characteristics. To incorporate these universal characteristics into his works is the task of the great writer. It does not matter if they are covered with the guise of this or that period, just so the inner soul is there. Don Braulio in El Castellano Viejo, was a representative

289. Piñeyro: op. cit., pp. 2-3.

type of the uncultured but well-meaning middle class Spaniard of the nineteenth century, and yet, how many Don Braulios do we not find in any country at the present time? Sinclair Lewis' Babbit is certainly one. What city, town or even village is there but what boasts its Rotary or Kiwanis Club? What are they, in many respects, but a group of well-meaning, patriotic Don Braulios?

Who has not experienced to a greater or lesser degree some of the indignities Larra mentions in his articles, ¿Entre qué gente estamos?, Vuelva Usted Mañana, El Castellano Viejo and others? How many middle class families are there today that do not have what we vulgarly call "company" manners which are only put on when there is a guest in the house?

The hypocrisies of high society are just as prevalent now as then. Idle gossip and slander still go on over the tea cups and the public is just as prone to spend its time in profitless pleasures as before. Perhaps there is more golf now and less billiards but there are countless hundreds who still enjoy the latter.

We do not have the cobblers, perhaps, or the ragmen to peddle and ferret out gossip but there are the sewing

circles, the bachelor clubs, the missionary societies and other social groups which serve as very good substitutes.

The world is as much a masked ball today as then. Perhaps the masques are not the same shape or size, perhaps the character of the participants has changed, but disguises of some kind or other are still universally worn. And if Larra thought the dancers then did not dance, what would he have to say of the so-called modern dancing?

The habitual sponger and his complement, the spendthrift, in the article, El Café, are two universal types that modern society harbours as much as did the nineteenth century. What college fraternity or sorority is there that does not "bid" the spendthrift in order to make it possible for the whole chapter to enjoy its daily "coke"? And is their opinion any higher of him than was that of the supposed friends of the rich young man of Larra's article, El Café, who fed them quantities of frozen ices and presented them with theater tickets?

Aside from universal types in Larra's articles, which are frequent, one has to consider other universal characteristics, the general subject matter, for instance, in the author's manner of presentation. It is so much more interesting to veil ones meaning under the cloak of

irony than to put it down in black and white. Then too, the breadth of subject matter is almost unlimited when one resorts to satire and irony. The reader can never be sure just how much truth there is in any statement of a satirist and this element of doubt is one of the important factors in determining his relative merit; a factor which will always give to satirical writings a greater appeal than they otherwise would have.

Larra was almost always a satirist; in his writings, in his life and even in his death. In the words of Guerra: "His death is a living irony, perhaps the more bitter because of its sorrow and cruelty. His irony is but a translation of his own painful experiences, a reflection of his own life. Before his death he was a living corpse."[290] This satirical quality of his is the most noticeable when he is in his bitterest moods. In his saddest and most disillusioned moments he wrote some of his greatest articles, such as La Noche Buena, El Día de Difuntos, and Necrología. And why is it that his satirical thrusts are more poignant, that they carry a more lasting and universal appeal when he is most bitter and sad? It is partly due, of course, to the personal

290. Guerra, Angel: op. cit., p. 6.

note they reflect. He does not shed his life's blood or go through the agonies of death without it being reflected in his writings. And when it is tears that are not shed, tears that leave their mysterious quivering in the very heart of his articles, it is little wonder that he touches a chord in the hearts of all of us that may never have been struck before.[291]

As has been previously inferred, the times had something to do with the full development of Larra's satire, for while the talent was innate, necessity was bound to sharpen it. And it did, and all posterity is grateful for it. Who does not recall the proverb: "Necessity is the mother of invention?" Such an adage very well applies to Larra's incomparable ability to satirize any and all things. And it is not only because he takes satire as his mode of expression that the things he ridicules take on more interest for us. It is the unanimity of his thought, his penetration and harmony of expression, together with his philosophy of life which finds the greatest truths in the simple and commonplace.[292] His writings have an appeal for all classes. Yet this does not make him a second-rate writer in any way,

291. Idem, p. 7.

292. Idem, p. 9.

because there is this distinction: Everyone gets something out of his writings, the scholar more, the ordinary layman, less, and each enjoys in his own sphere the things which he is able to understand. Doesn't everyone read Don Quijote? And yet how many grasp its inner significance, its appeal to all ages, past, present and future, its eternal message?

Another characteristic of Larra's satire, that gives it a more universal appeal, is his power of condensation. One of the chief objections one has to Estébanez's articles is that he takes so long to say so little. Customs, if described in brief, are always interesting, and Larra's articles will be read long after those of his contemporaries are practically forgotten.

CONCLUSION.

It is not the writer's purpose in these last few pages to attempt to discuss, with any degree of authority or finality, the intrinsic merit of Mariano José de Larra as a *costumbrista*. Such a purpose can very well be left to those more capable of judging.

So far the writer has attempted to discuss the origen of the *genre*, to give a biographical sketch, to discuss the articles on manners in an impersonal way, and lastly she has wished to present a literary appreciation, taking into account the influence of the French, the author's universal appeal, and, in general, his merit as a *costumbrista*.

It would be very difficult and perhaps not profitable to ennumerate the various estimates of Larra and his writings dating from his contemporaries on up to the present time. So many of the criticisms have been unjust, and so many untrue that it is difficult even yet to separate the wheat from the chaff. It is not unusual that his contemporaries dared not appreciate him. Few authors enjoy any great fame in their life time. Like-

wise, Larra's personal life and his suicide caused critics to hesitate to commit themselves. Then, too, professional jealousy and envy entered in, as is ever the case among those of any profession, to a greater or lesser degree. Because of the remarkable and ever increasing interest in Larra and his works, critics and writers have finally begun to cast favorable eyes in his direction. They have been forced to give him a place in the sun. Public opinion has demanded it. No longer does one throw up his hands in horror at mention of Larra's name or turn his back and refuse to commit himself to an opinion. Larra is being judged by those of the twentieth century in the sane and impartial way that he should have been previously. By many he is conceded to be the greatest prose writer of his day,[293] by others of the whole nineteenth century,[294] and as a *costumbrista* he is generally conceded to be without a peer.

It is perhaps not just to conclude this study without a few words as to Larra's prose style, however incapable the writer may feel in the matter. It is a subject, however, which needs a Spanish critic, for such a one is

293. Azorín: *op. cit.*, p. 278.

294. Cejador: *op. cit.*, p. 116.

better able to judge a language that is his own medium of expression.

One usually thinks of a journalist as a writer of the moment and it is not necessary that he cultivate any particular style other than the ready word and the telegraphic phrase. But Larra is a literary journalist. He chooses his words deliberately, carefully, and with an unfaltering hand. His powers of description are very keen and while he does not often describe exterior things yet one has only to read Las Antigüedades de Mérida, the description of the corsairs in La Caza or Impresiones de un Viaje to see what a master of description he is. There is always a living soul in everything he describes, even if it be inanimate nature.

Larra had a large vocabulary and he was very particular in the correct use of words. He felt very keenly the lack of erudition among the writers of the day and evidently had the hope of remedying this condition somewhat when he began his Dictionary of Synonyms, which unfortunately never was completed.

Larra is never prolix. Even the articles which he prefaces with a philosophical discussion[295] are not boresome and one feels that each word has its necessary place in the article to complete the full meaning. He writes a clear, easy-flowing, simple prose style. He

295. Obras, p. 266, p. 272, p. 282, p. 485, p. 486.

often resorts to the use of similes, parables and illustrations but he is never ornate and rarely obscure. In his earlier articles one notices a tendency to be oratorical, a very common thing in all young writers who feel themselves almost inarticulate before the many things there are in the world to write about.

Larra is most fluent when he is in his most depressing moments and his words fairly tumble over themselves in his haste to relieve his soul of the bitterness that is corroding it, e.g. in such articles as Un Reo de Muerte or El Duelo.

It was customary among the inferior writers of the day to use latin phrases and French words instead of their Castilian equivalent, chiefly to show their erudition. While bewailing this practice Larra does the same thing himself but usually in a tone of satire.[296] His frequent use of French words, however, is chiefly due to his constant association with French authors and works. Likewise a master hand can always do what a poor technician dare not.

Larra had to express himself in writing just as an artist has to express his soul on canvas or the musician his spirit in music. It was not possible for

296. Obras, pp. 25-26, pp. 278-281.

him to live and not write. Only for a short time, toward the last of his life, did he cease writing, and he was not really living then. What seemed so terrible to him was to have this inner urge and yet to have to write under such difficult circumstances. No wonder his pen burned his fingers like a red hot coal and his eloquence reached the heights when he felt himself so hampered on all sides. Oppression always brings its accompanying hero, hard times its immortal literary genius.

Larra's criticism of Los Amantes de Teruel is one of the finest things he has done, both as to content as well as excellence of prose style. It was one of the last things he wrote and it stands as a most representative piece of the author's technique at a time when it was most fully developed. His choice of words, his fine distinction of meanings, his clear cut analysis of situations and his marvellous command of the Castilian language, in this as well as many other articles, have helped to win the place posterity has but recently assigned to him, namely, that of one of Spain's greatest prose writers as well as her best costumbrista.

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